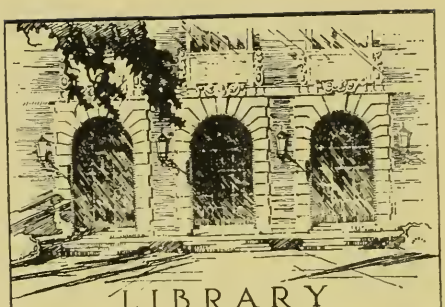

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A MODERN MINISTER.

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"Away in the quietest of the rooms by the window."

The Cheveley Novels.

A MODERN MINISTER.

"The Church is all very well," said Sydney Smith, "but how about the World, the Flesh, and the Devil?"

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS,
EDINBURGH AND LONDON.
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A MODERN MINISTER.

CHAPTER I.

LABAN WIX, PAWNBROKER.

THE effect came afterwards, when Andrew Wilson went home to the humble lodging and its patient little inmate. He had always gone home to dinner at twelve, a special concession through the kindness of the Manager. Upon this occasion he went home, but never lifted his eyes, his face was not sunned by pleasant thoughts at returning to her; he sank upon a chair, merely drawing her to him, looking up in the pretty face with a mild mournfulness, inexpressibly pathetic; and taking her hand, which he held fondly.

"Are you ill, dear?" she asked. Amy could be intensely sympathetic, the child was naturally sensitive. It came of the impetuous, passionate, half-wild nature which made her heart glow with emotions quite strange to the drawing-room young lady of unexceptionable birth. She was a wayward, intractable little creature, perhaps, but she had some charming ways with her, and one of these was that measure of sensitiveness which made her companionship a bond of sympathy. The scale is very often turned, and no end of wilfulness

pardoned by this softer forethought and tenderness, exquisite alike in the cottage and the mansion. Very often the inequalities are lost sight of in the pleasant ways which charm unconsciously, and the untutored solace of one of these little ones will sometimes do more than the experienced and coldly philosophic wisdom of the elders. Her devoted attention moved him sadly—it was so hard having to tell her the ill-omened news—yet he would feel the better for her sympathy. To her query, solicitous and tremulous, he answered simply and truthfully, with quivering lips,—

"I've been turned off, and our little income is lost! I did hope I should never have to return to the theatre!"

"No, you must not do that!" answered the girl thoughtfully, and with a slight shudder.

"What then can I do? I know too well the difficulty of getting any respectable employment, at my time of life, and in a shabby coat." He spoke with a bitterness that amounted almost to irony.

"You have a good friend in the gentleman who has already been so kind!"

"He is as badly off as I am now: some envious villain has been working the ruin of the best of men. Oh, Lord!" cried the old man, in a despairing voice, "Why are the wicked permitted thus to wrong the innocent?"

"You mustn't give way like this," and she fell upon her knees beside him, her arms resting upon his knees, wooing him to smiles; "bear up, for my sake; think, what will become of me if you give up?" This she said to entice him from the dull lethargy of pain in which he appeared to be plunged.

"It seems so hard!" he murmured. "Just getting a few little things together, making a happy home, providing for you, my child, saving you from untold hardship, and now to be deprived of it all—for our tiny savings will melt like snow now that I am out of an engagement; and, as you say, should anything befall me, whom will you look to, where will you go for that safe home you have had with me?"

Then she stood up, all brave with her few years' wisdom,

and hopeful; but she had not meant to lead to this by that remark of hers.

"Don't you begin sorrowing because of me, nor thinking anything is about to befall you! Remember all you have done for me, how you lifted me out of homeless and uncared-for uncertainty, and provided me with everything! You have given me love which I had never known before, and have made a changed girl of me; and I have never ceased to think of Dr. Nichols's kind words, that with *me* rested your happiness. I *will* try to make you happy, by being good and useful, and by loving you truly; only smile a little, and let me see you get the better of the trouble! I daresay now," added the child, with characteristic simplicity, "better folk than we have suffered somehow like this many and many a time." She walked lightly to a corner, and brought to him an old friend, mute but ready with its tuneful fellowship. It had borne the burden of many a sorrow before this, and, as he mechanically passed the bow athwart the strings, and drew forth a sad and sensitive quivering, it seemed an expression of the over-wrought heart itself.

Days went by, and Andrew Wilson became weaker; he tried right and left for employment, went hither and thither in reply to advertisements, sought far and near for work at the desk, and was told younger men were required; was indifferently bidden to call again, and called again to be coldly told there was no vacancy. He persevered, but with a sinking heart, a fainter courage; Amy cheering him, accompanying him to the very doors, with words of hope to within the portals. No one knew how the child suffered as he came from each with disconsolate visage and dragging footstep, and how difficult it was for her to cheer him on to the next. It was November in London, of itself sufficiently depressing to kill a man of this calibre. Andrew Wilson suffered terribly, not so much from the chill grey fogs and unpleasant weather, or from abstinence (for he had no heart to take his proper sustenance), as from utter weariness akin to utter hopelessness; he wasted to a shadow, and each day's quest became a more dispiriting and discouraging failure. Only the old legend

of the weaker going to the wall, as they do daily; younger manhood seemed to have lost its chivalry, and feeling to be banished from the universe.

One day, returning from some of these unsuccessful applications, Andrew Wilson, moody and sorrowing, looking on the ground instead of straight ahead, as these poor souls should, ran upon another in similar plight, but whom misfortune had not deprived of his politeness, for he lifted his shining hat with marvellous affability, and remarked graciously,—

"Now I do hope your lordship is not hurt! Very careless of me! Don't apologize, I beg; it was quite my fault, quite! Absorbed in thought—didn't observe any one advancing; but I crave your lordship's pardon!"

The other laid a hand gently on his arm, speaking sadly, while setting him right.

"You are in error—I am not a nobleman!"

"But I am,—Sir Dickson Cheffinger, of CHEFFINGER!" And the poor gentleman watched narrowly the result of this announcement. It did not create any marked effect. The newly entitled was neither astounded nor confounded, but he looked inexpressibly worn and tired. Sir Dickson noticed this, and he said,—

"You don't look well—seem poorly—come and have something! Nay, but you shall!" and, linking his arm through that of the other, he dragged at the clerk until he had his way; and anywhere but in London, where poor gentlemen are many, the spectacle of these two unfortunates, neither illumined by very clear lights, one as wearied and sick of it all as the other, one with his child and his music to live for, both brittle straws by vulgar measure; the other with his noble compatriots and estates in air, both bubble-hued by common thought;—the spectacle, we say, would elsewhere have attracted notice, excited ridicule, set good folk staring, and the dogs a-barking; but in London—well, in London they were one with the many.

"We will enter this hotel—not like my Club, but it will do!"

It was not an hotel, it was a tavern, and those grouped at the bar stared hard and grinned: cordwainers, drysalters, dray-

men, and two or three from the cab-rank near. They enjoyed Sir Dickson's call for champagne, immensely, and gathered round. "Seedy, for swells, mate!" said one. "Jackdaws!" was the contemptuous reply; although the ornithological application scarcely appears.

"Be off without paying, you'll see! We're in for a shine!" The man at the bar opened a mock champagne bottle and poured out some vile effervescing fluid with,—

"Money, gents, please? Three-and-six!" And the cord-wainers *et cie.* laughed outright. Sir Dickson plunged his hand into his pocket, as accustomed to so doing, unconscious of the grey gulf between this and that: but soon withdrew his hand, a look of blank dismay overspreading his delicate, care-worn face.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, "I've only three half-pence! But, never mind,—leave my card," fumbling in every pocket. "Left the case on dressing-table! Awfully careless! What's to be done?" pitifully to the other needy gentleman, who, powerless to advise, could only look timorously over his shoulder at the brawny group with the pewter pots, closing them in and prepared for a scene. If they expected an outbreak they were disappointed, for the two were passive as the most guilty of culprits. Meanwhile the barman had whistled to another employed upon the embellishment of a row of cans, and this one had slipped out, returning instantly with a police-officer, who, catching the look by which the barman indicated the unfortunates, stood before them, stern, and as meaning no nonsense.

"What's the charge?" In a husky voice, yet sounding ferocious to the culprits, whom he could have put one under each arm and have thus marched off, there and then, to the station.

"Calling for three-an'-sixpenny champagne, an' niver a blissid nothink in both their pockits to pay the reckoning!"

The officer looked really grim at that, and he said,—

"Well, you'll eft to come along o' me, yer know; and best come quietly!"—Giving certain mechanical appliances in his pocket an ugly sort of click.

"My patience, what an indignity!" exclaimed Sir Dickson Cheffinger. "Whatever will my people think!" Even in this emergency regardful of his style and family.

"Better not let them know my name," he whispered to his companion in trouble; "sure to get into the papers, such a disgrace,—for a Cheffinger, too! But never mind, Baron Rothschild will bail me out,—'Any time, Cheffinger,' said the Baron the other night at dinner, when we contrived to have a quiet word together,—'Any time I can be of service, command me!'"

Andrew Wilson could not quite understand his new acquaintance, who had thus inopportunely introduced him to the law.

"Now, gents, is this little matter to be settled, or will yer reserve yer defence?"

"I am sorry, officer, this unforeseen occurrence should have rendered it imperative to—"

"Now, come, none o' that palavering. Pay down, or off yer goes!"

"No," said Sir Dickson, with dignity, "I will not. I was about to explain the matter, when you, with a rudeness I never experienced from a police-officer before, interrupted me, and—and—well, quite checked the explanation, for, by the spotless ermine, I don't remember a word of it now." Said with most ludicrous innocence.

"Daft!" went the round, and poor Wilson shuddered, for he thought, what if he had been taken in tow by a madman! "The very streets seem to rise up against me," he said to himself, despairingly, "and in all this City, not one hand is raised to help me!" Now mark.

The doors were thrown open for the better egress of the suspicious-looking confederates, the spectators divided; and saying, "Now you'll go quietly, won't yer?" the officer caught an arm of each with a grip which might have been studied in the Tower; when, looking nervously at the thronged pathway, Sir Dickson suddenly gave a joyful cry. A passer-by, ever alive to the appeal of the calamitous, turned instantly, and in two strides was upon the scene, amidst the contentious group, which fell back with sullen deference.

"What is the matter, officer?—You are hurting them, violence is unjustifiable! Now, Mr. Cheffinger, be brief, and tell me what all this is about?" To the poor gentleman, whose face was now sunny, and relieved of its temporary embarrassment.

Mr. Cheffinger explained, and the gentleman handed his card to the officer.

"I suppose if I settle this claim, my friend will be at liberty? Any way, I will be responsible for his reappearance, if necessary."

The officer consulted with the publican, and the affair was arranged amicably, and to the full satisfaction of both.

"And when will Mr. Cheffinger be more circumspect?" asked the Rev. Westley Garland, with the old kind smile, as they walked slowly along. "Suppose I had not been in town, and had not been passing, how ill you might have fared! And your friend here, who is this?"

Mr. Garland looked more sorry than amused when the other replied,—

"On the honour of a Cheffinger, I am unable to say."

The clerk explained, and his voice was so gentle, while all woe-begone, that the Minister was interested immediately.

"You have not been well," he said decisively, as warding off contradiction by virtue of personal observation; "and,—pardon me, you appear to be in trouble?"

Andrew Wilson was overcome by the Minister's solicitous inquiry, and that nameless sympathy which is expressed by manner, rather than words.

"Yes," he replied slowly and painfully, "I have been very unfortunate!"

"Perhaps I may be enabled to help you."

Without reservation the clerk narrated the incidents with which the reader is familiar, and, as was perfectly natural, was warm in his praise of George Percival. The Minister evidenced singular interest.

"You would like to know Mr. Percival," said the clerk simply; "his manners are as courteous and gracious as your

own. He has been a good friend to me (God bless him!) ever since I told him about my little girl; and he said to me, 'I can feel for you, Andrew, I may have to provide for one myself some day!' And now," said the old man, with bitterness, "he is as ill off as I am, in the sense of occupation; although, to be sure, he has his books to depend on, while I have *nothing*, and with all the years and health on the wrong side. Well I recall now how he said to me that morning when it happened, 'Now, Andrew, old friend, I have to put my experimental philosophy into practice,—to live by my books, and by them to keep *my* little one!' I don't know what he meant, and I didn't pay much heed to it then, being so overwhelmed myself; but I remember it now. He is not in London, I was told the day before yesterday, when I ventured to call where he lives, to see if he could do something for me; 'Gone down home,' the servant said, 'into Hertfordshire;' and I came away the worse for that piece of news. All things seem the same! the same!"

The Minister betrayed no emotion beyond a slightly rising colour; but there was significance deeper than the mere coincidence revealed in this curious encounter. He turned to Sir Dickson,—

"Why have you not let me hear from you? I have taken no news in this instance to mean bad news!"

"Very bad!" responded Sir Dickson plaintively; "and yet," thoughtfully, "the Princess!" He laid a hand gently on his friend's arm. "The Princess! No sooner found than lost, and I cannot forget that beauteous vision!"

The Minister thought it one of his olden vagaries. He nodded with his usual graceful attention, and then said,— "Now I want to hear if any progress has been made."

"You will excuse me," timidly interrupted the clerk, "I must be getting home, I have already been away too long."

He saw that the Minister and the strange gentleman were engaged with some private matter. He thought, too, of Amy; and, for another thing, he did not wish the Minister to see his lodging: it was so humble now.

Mr. Garland shook hands very kindly with this new waif

added to his long list of pensioners, and when Andrew went on his way it was with a lighter heart, and to lay before his little *protégée* a crisp five-pound note.

It served to provide a variety of necessaries, but the child saw that her guardian was sinking in spite of it all; and when alone she grew very sad, taxing her shrewd head how best to relieve the depression under which she thought he was wasting away. Amy did not know, as we know, that there comes a time of life when a blow is thrice a blow; a time when there is less power to support it; when a sudden shock, followed by continual disappointment, wears away the body, benumbs the spirits, deadens the very soul itself.

And one morning, when a thick yellow fog overhung the City, and changed to ghastly hues every object within and without the houses, Andrew could not rise at the accustomed hour. Amy made some toast, and prepared the tempting breakfast a child so daintily understands the contriving of; but he could not take it, for a choking sensation was at the throat, and a chill that deadened even his terrible anxiety on her account. She could not bear the glassy look that came into the fond old eyes, and she brought his violin, and placed it by his side. Half mechanically the thin fingers felt for the strings, but their coldness thrilled him, and he feebly raised a hand searching for the warmer touch he needed at that moment. She knelt beside him, his hand straying to the grateful warmth below her curling hair. More faintly the touch dallied with the tresses; then the hand weighed heavy upon her shoulder, and one of the myriad broken upon the wheel had passed away.

It was a sorry time for the child. At first she was too overcome, mourning for her poor dead friend, to do anything; then she kissed the cold face with great reverence. She went very slowly and sadly down stairs, and told the woman of the house. She, with feeling, enjoined her to remain in the chamber she herself used, saying they would see to everything. And she did so, faithfully handing over to the child such few shillings as remained after the outlay attending that humble consignment to the last resting-place. Amy met with sym-

pathizers in plenty, but, after her small stock of money had dwindled away, times went badly with her, and it seemed as though the period of uncertain knocking about, which preceded the theatrical era, had returned. One after another the poor neighbours sought to befriend her to the best of their slender means, but the fare was sorry and the hardship great. Then she fell upon strange quarters, and knew one of the most singular of experiences.

* * * * * *

A shop stood at a corner where three ways met, and the continuous stream of pedestrians seemed for ever rounding a point; a dingy old shop as any in discoloured London, bearing this sign upon the half-circular board facing the three ways,—

LABAN WIX, PAWNBROKER.

The windows were stuffed with the oldest of unredeemed pledges, and these the proprietor, who never aspired to the accomplishment of window-dressing, had not disturbed for a very long period. There, cemented by dust, old treasures sometime of happy hearts knew a union of repose strangely at variance with the bustle and unrest of the busy streets; in good truth the old shawls and antique cruets, the roll of dress-silk and young woman's jacket, the warming-pan, snuff-box, and writing-desk, were too far gone to attract the cursory attention of one, even, of the myriads turning the corner daily.

Inside the dreary mart of exchange all was of corresponding dinginess and dustiness; and old Mr. Wix, who conducted the business himself, was sometimes invisible in the cloud of dust arising when bundles were redeemed after being left longer than usual, and the bonder brought them down on the counter with a bang that caused his timid clients to start dismayed.

Altogether it was not a nice place; the most devoted of his visitors were glad to escape from his company and premises.

Nevertheless "Old Wix's" was an institution, and an accommodation. It was not unusual for people of the back streets to toss up to see who should drop in at Laban's, and out would come an old mended petticoat from one, a pillow-case from

another, an apron from a third, a flat-iron from a fourth, and so on, until a bundle was made up: the proceeds to be divided, and a glass of gin awarded to the delicate ambassador.

Odd patrons had Laban Wix, and he would leer ominously over the bit of card whereon his fumbling fingers traced name and amount. He was curt and sharp and bearish, and sometimes swore.

The old man did not enjoy the most enviable of reputations amongst those who every week derived benefit from his liberality; and he was called hard names for his thrift. The more pious of his customers averred that one night the devil pledged his tongs, and wanted, afterwards, to take them out without paying the interest; and because Master Wix would have none of such dealing it was said he was very much tormented, which might or might not account for his sourness of temper. Another select story current was to the effect of the old man being very much of a miser. It was commonly believed that great treasures were concealed about the premises; but since nobody ever ventured beyond the shop counter, it was clear this necessarily amounted to mere speculation. In short, all that the idle and vulgar could invent, the malicious circulate, and the credulous believe, was discussed; and the old pawnbroker had a sorry time of it.

Mr. Wix used to keep his shop open long after any of his neighbours: he held a theory that several intelligent dwellers thereabouts used to go drinking, and in various ways dissipating the whole of their hard-earned coin, and afterwards come to his obliging temple of commerce for the transfer of that which represented supper and breakfast. Thus he was open very late, generally until twelve o'clock, when he would march round with the shutters, keeping a sharp look-out all the time he was fixing and barring and screwing; then, from some innermost recess, he would come staggering under weight of a door which was lowered on to its hinges and closed, locked, bolted, barred, and padlocked. Then supper, a scant ceremony over the driest piece of cheese conceivable. Following this, another minute examination of the premises from top to bottom, lest any one had, by stealth, crept in while

he had been writing upon one of his tickets, as if a wizened scarecrow like this old half-starved eccentric would have had the power of defending himself, supposing such to have been the case. Then into his small back-yard, where he had spent more than he had ever spent upon anything, in the purchase of a mortary sort of cement, wherein he had fixed all his unredeemed old bottles with the bottoms knocked out. Mr. Wix used to get it all over by a quarter-past twelve. After closing, when all by himself, with only the hideous stock-in-trade about him, each article of which was symbolical of some terrible care and grief, some shattered home or broken heart; then, when alone with his griping, greedy harvest, he knew pangs of a weird sort, remorseful, ghostly feelings, and grim terror-stricken suffering, which all the counting of his gold or jingling of his trinkets or flashing of his diamonds could not appease; suffering that made him a coward indeed, all knocking at the knees and panting while he tremblingly looked over his shoulder; for there always seemed somebody about; and he fancied grisly, horrible shapes stealing from the bundles, rustling the garments, and causing something or other to tumble over. On windy nights it was worse even than this, and the queer commotion amongst the store was such as to indicate to his troubled mind the still more troubled spirits haunting the shelves, pulling at the chattels, shrieking and screaming in the top chambers, where reserves were piled upwards to the ceiling, moaning and double moaning in cupboards where the plate was kept; and Laban would crouch with very fear, so close the talons seemed upon him. Yet it was not convenient to keep an assistant—unless that assistant could make it convenient to keep himself: but as the pleasures and advantages incidental to residence with Mr. Wix were not overrated, the contingency was highly improbable. Once or twice he had thought over the importance of taking an apprentice; but, to tell the truth, he had a deep-seated dread of London boys, whom he playfully styled the imps incarnate. That plan therefore remained in abeyance, and the haunted pawnbroker remained haunted unbrokenly.

One blustering evening, with business slack and houses

closing quicker for the inclement night, it was very dull in at the pawnbroker's. Nobody seemed anxious to pledge; the dim, rain-besprinkled globes were hung upon the outer wall for nothing, the public would not pawn; and the firm sat crooning in the little den at the back of the shop, wondering if there was nothing left to pawn, or if a newer and a better shop had opened in the vicinity; and very indignantly did the old man take an unredeemed poker, and turn over the contents of the window. There had not been such a turn-over for twelve or more years; and an old opera-glass, that had not seen the gas for all that time, came up and stared all bleared and sleepily at the changed custodian, whom the other pledges now moved to the bottom, had seen grow grey and withered, and completely saturnine.

Laban read but little. He had amongst the pawned lots a pile of old books, and one of these was "Lives of the Misers;" and this work became his book of faith; but Laban read very little.

His general occupation in slack times was weighing the plate, to see if there was any decrease in weight through keeping: brighten or burnish he never did, lest it should lighten the gold or silver. He was weighing the plate this night we tell of, mumbling to his scales, and half swearing because some of the pieces came out a degree lighter than he expected.

A tall and not ungraceful woman entered the shop, and with her a little girl; both were thinly clad; they looked worn and a-hungered, and the woman's face betrayed a sharp and agonized struggle.

The old man stared at them curiously and descended from his stool with alacrity—it might be a watch or a bracelet; he was in the mood for driving a hard bargain that night. Mr. Wix was naturally brusque, and constitutionally rude, and he mumbled imperiously, as would a man in a large way of business whose time was not to be trifled with,—

"What yer got, an' what d'ye want on it?"

"Have—you—a—more private place than this?" tremblingly asked the poor woman, while she leaned with great weariness upon Laban Wix's counter.

The pawnbroker indicated an inner stall, partitioned off for the convenience of the more sensitive of his clients.

"Now, mum—your pleasure?"

"What will you allow me on this?" She had one hand on the curl-clustered head of the child, while the other rested heavily upon the counter, where Laban looked eagerly down. It might be a diamond; the old man's eyes glistened, he was in a rare mood for diamonds. But there was nothing under his customer's hand; he looked in her face, and he came to the decision that she was mad; it was evident she could see something that he could not see; he drew back—shrank, as it were; for he objected to mad people strongly, and more particularly to a mad woman. Or, could the diamond have fallen? He turned icy as he swooped to the floor.

"Allow you on what?" he gasped, still upon his hands and knees with an oil lamp; "There's nothing here!"

"Upon this child!" The hand was still upon the little curly head. The man stared at the woman; the woman stared at the man; and the child, half frightened, looked first at one and then at the other. She had a pretty, flushed, rain-sprinkled face; the old man had not seen such a face for the last half of his term of days; and, taken aback, he could only murmur,—

"I don't think I understand, quite?"

"I have pledged or sold everything to keep us from starving; I have only this left, but—she—is old enough to be very handy! We want food, shelter, clothing; if you will provide these for the child, I will leave her for a time in your hands, and her ready service will amply repay you; but you will advance me a trifle, however small, to enable me to procure some sort of a shelter for myself?"

This was all so unusual, and so contrary to the business ethics of Master Wix, that he stood irresolute, a semi-comical expression upon his countenance. Then he pretended reluctance, but thinking of his house all the while. He might make the pledge very useful, and his dreary place would be robbed of its loneliness; but he was not going to offer much. That would be contrary to his principles.

"What do you want on it?" he asked grumblingly.

"What will you allow me on this?"—Page 14.

"One sovereign!" was the decisive answer.

"Five shillings!" replied Wix, profoundly indifferent.

"Can you lend me no more?" asked the woman impatiently, with her arms about the little one.

"Well, you know, it's not lawful, strictly speaking; although I don't know that there's a law agen it, but it's the feed, you know! Can't lend more than five. Take it or leave it! You'll have less than no interest to pay on that; only—remember, at the end of the year, if not had out, *it's mine!*"

The woman nodded, and while he wrote upon the ticket and its duplicate, she knelt before the child, her throbbing brow rested upon its bosom; and, clasping a small white hand, she passionately implored forgiveness for the deed, explaining with broken, tremulous sorrow that, although not her own, yet was she dearly loved.

Then a hasty embrace, and an entreaty that the man would use her kindly; and, snatching up the money with one last hurried kiss, she fled from the place, disappeared under those misty, mocking golden balls, and faded away in the drizzling, darksome night.

And Laban Wix stood and stared at the child in pawn.

It was a new sensation altogether, having a thing of this sort; he did not even know which ought to speak first. Laban spoke,—

"Of course you don't eat suppers?"

The child was frightened, and answered "No!"

"But to-night you're hungry, not having had much lately? You won't ever be as hungry again as you are to-night!"

The child shook her head, her eyes filled with tears. She was thinking of the dead.

"Well, there's some 'taters left from dinner, put 'em on, and make some broth!"

He pointed to an unredeemed saucepan, and told her the situation of the cistern. The child did as she was bidden, then the old man not unkindly took her by the hand.

"Just you come along o' me, and I'll show you where things is kept!"

He led the way to the back offices. He felt very strange,

and as yet scarcely accustomed to it, but she was so innocently pretty, and withal so quick and ready, he rather rubbed his hands over the transaction. A rat ran along a shelf, crouched on his hind legs, brushed his whiskers, and, peeping impudently at the new comer, jogged on homewards to the wainscot.

"I'll wring your neck!" muttered Mr. Wix, with evil design anent that quadruped.

The little girl shuddered at sight of the creature, whereupon the old man reassured her thus:—

"Don't you be afeard o' them, they're my pets, and wery useful they are when one can't send to the butcher's; of course one'd prefer hare, but beggars mustn't be choosers! Wust on 'em is, they nibble at the pledges!"

The child turned faint at the bare mention, and thought even the cold wet street was better than this.

A poor woman entered the shop—she carried a parcel—and in tearful accents begged something might be advanced her upon a little frock. Peeping behind the partition, the child in pawn heard and saw, and her tears fell like rain.

"It ain't worth nothing—got a trinket you can throw in with it?"

With some difficulty and with trembling, the woman removed her wedding-ring.

"Light as a feather!" grumbled Laban, then tossed both to his new assistant.

"Two bob, take it or leave it!"

The head drooped assentingly, and she leaned painfully against the partition. Then, while the pawnbroker wrote, he bade the child tie a piece of string round the bundle, and pointed out the place where the ring should be put amongst others of the kind; he then instructed her how to place the parcel in one of the uppermost pigeon-holes, to which she ascended by a ladder; when she came down he pushed the ticket towards her, and directed it should be given to the customer. The child held her hand out to the woman's, and, while she dropped the card into the poor thin hand extended, returned also the ring. A meaning glance stayed the exclama-

tion upon the woman's lip, and she gratefully took them both. When this customer was well out of the shop, Laban chuckled pleasantly, and ordered,—

"Put the shutters up—but first, sweep the shop out!" Pointing to an old broom, the hair of which was worn to a frill. This sweeping was always an operation of importance, for Laban had come upon rare treasures in his sweeping days: pins and buttons, tape, string, and other relics of his customers; he had, indeed, once found a threepenny-bit, carried about with him ever after in a corner of his waistcoat pocket enwrapped in tissue paper, as a sort of decoy in case there might be another about. The little girl having swept out to the best of her ability, the master went over it all again, giving her a lesson, as he called it, and effectually cleaned up the whole, bending over the be-handled dust-pan by the light of a farthing candle, to sort out the finds. Diverse as these were, there was always a certain similarity, and he had an old box for each: pins, hair-pins, tape, ribbon, buttons, needles, paper, string, calico shreds, flannel list, and bits of leather off worn boots so often crossing his threshold. The sweeping was hardly accomplished when a rough-looking customer entered. He handed the pawnbroker a silk pocket-handkerchief. It was a good one and probably stolen.

"Can't lend much on this," muttered old Wix, "it's going, —look a-here, see them lines, that'll be a slit; it's rotten as can be;" holding it up to the light.

Without a word the man whisked it into his pocket and strode out of the shop; and Laban was troubled. He meant to have had that pocket-handkerchief.

"Billy Johnson's found another shop!" he muttered discontentedly; and then turning to the child, "Here you, follow that chap, and find out where he takes the pocket-hanky!"

The bright eyes glittered, and she was on pursuit like a greyhound, below somebody's umbrella grown strangely ventilated since left in pawn.

She followed him along street after street, wide and narrow, but her chase terminated at a beershop. Then she commenced retracing her way, but became confused, for he had led her far

from Wix's establishment. Bewildered, she stood by a lamp-post reflecting: she could not recall any definite landmark to guide her.

A gentleman came past, tall, with handsome, kindly face; and he paused on the instant, stooping to the flushed rain-sprinkled face, much taken by its beauty, or its plight on that cheerless night, all exposed, and without even a hat to bind back its tangle of glistening tresses.

"You seem in trouble, little girl—can I help you?"

"I have lost my way, sir!" she cried, flushed and panting.

"Yes, and will be laid up after this, or I am mistaken! Perhaps I can direct you—where is your home?"

"I have no home—I am in pawn!"

"What do you mean? Stand under my umbrella and tell me!"

She explained sufficient to account for her singular remark, and the gentleman looked down upon the little fugitive, much interested.

"Wix, Pawnbroker!" he repeated; "Yes, I know the name and shop; I once held a Mission in the neighbourhood, and learnt much of the poverty and suffering thereabouts."

"You are a clergyman!" said the child, with a considerable admixture of awe.

"Yes, and something more—a friend, even as my Divine Master was a friend to all the poor and sorrowing, all the sick and suffering, and above all to little children without home or friends; so come and let me see if something can be done with Mr. Wix."

"I am afraid he will be rude to you!" she ventured timidly, while trotting along beside him.

"But I do not mind that; and even rudeness may be sifted until finer meaning is found. I have seen the old man in his shop. I am not sure, but I fancy I have been in; nay, now I think, I *am* sure of it. I called upon a poor woman who was insufficiently clad, and I went to Wix's for her parcel."

"You did that!" said the child breathlessly.

"And is it so very wonderful, little one?" he asked, with

his sad smile. The child was silent. It was sweet company to her, and she would have prolonged that walk, under the outspreading umbrella, comfortable and warm as some tent; for he held it well over her.

In due time they entered the shop, the proprietor of which looked up with angry suspicion.

"Good evening, Mr. Wix!"

"It ain't a good evening! It's one o' the baddest and wustest that ever was. You're the parson, an' you ain't wanted here!"

The gentleman shook the rain-drops from his umbrella with undisturbed serenity, and still with that kind and patient smile which had so won upon the desolate child.

"I expect the clergyman, like the doctor, is not always the most welcome of visitors, Mr. Wix; but by your leave I will stand up a few minutes while the shower continues."

The old man surlily proceeded with the occupation upon which he was engaged; the Minister remarked carelessly,—

"Been talking with our little friend here; she had lost her way, and I've had the pleasure of leading her home. But isn't this a somewhat irregular transaction, Mr. Wix?"

"It ain't any bizness of your'n that I can see, to come along preaching at me for, whether it's reg'lar or irreg'lar!"

"Well, the fact is, I have made it my particular business to study the ills and wrongs befalling human life!"

"Then it's a pity you didn't come an' see me afore; I've a lot on 'em! But we'll settle this pretty quick. Are you in bizness here or am I? Are you in pardnership with me? 'Cause if not, it's no way acceptable for you to interfere!"

"I intended no discourtesy, my good friend!"

"I ain't a good friend! A poor beggar's nearer the description! Bin here forty year come Janivary, and lost money every year!"

"What I meant to say was, that the transaction is scarcely lawful."

"You'd be puzzled to show me a law agen it!"

"Because it is what no just law-maker would ever dream of guarding against."

Mr. Wix deigned no reply. He resumed the pinning and unpinning of his bundles; the old pawnbroker was moth-haunted, and every evening held an examination of any bundles he happened to be suspicious about.

"I have a proposal to make," said the Minister, with decision. "It is that you allow *me* to provide this forlorn child with some comfortable home. I have no doubt but that one among my people will receive her and afford the protection of a mother; and any expense attending it, I shall be happy to set straight! You will admit this to be better than her remaining here; and in the event of any of her friends calling upon you, you will only have to refer them to me. There is my card."

"And there's mine; WIX, PAWNBROKER; and if you've nothing to leave, good ev'ning;" tossing a pawn-ticket to the Minister, who, in no way offended by the brusqueness, returned it with civil thanks. He was a great student of life, patient, and strong under affront, but uniformly mild before misfortune. How did he know what long train of troubles and disappointments might not have led up to this crinkled and crabbed old age?

"Put your shutters up, Mr. Wix, and let me provide a little supper! '

"Perwiding a thing, and taking a thing away, is a different matter; you can perwide as often and as much as you like!"

The Minister went out, and was gone some little time; when he returned the place was closed for the night. He had brought in with him a variety of delicacies.

"You've bin a long while—I ain't particlar about shops when I'm hungry!"

Mr. Garland handed his wet coat to the broker, who inwardly appraised it admiringly, then whispered confidentially, "I buy old coats, you know, as well as lend on 'em!"—and proceeded to hang it upon a nail.

"I think our little maid had better slip off that frock and those old boots—you will have a heavy medical fee to pay if you are not careful!"

A look of blank dismay overspread the hard face, and he

quickly emptied one of the bundles and tossed a blue silk frock, a pair of white-ribbed stockings, and some boots of the Hessian make, to the child, with a command to retire and change. She obeyed at once, with a glance of reverent gratitude at the thoughtful friend; he with a singular look of pity divided between the child and those sad reminders of some other grievous trouble.

"How full the world seems of sorrow and trouble!"

"I've had nothing else for sixty-six year!"

"You must have seen much around you!"

"The shelves have. Them bundles could tell queer stories. Sometimes of a night, while I sit here, the most awfullest things comes forth from those shelves, and there's a many creeps from the cupboards upstairs, lean, staring, horrible things. I passes 'em going up to bed, and they clutch me with long sharp claws. Ugh! they're a beastly lot! I throwed that packet o' duplicates at 'em last night, but there's no scaring them, and the noise they make arterwards is awful! That's what I want the little un for—understand? Sort o' company!"

The Minister took the old man's hand with great kindness, and with sympathy he said,—

"You have been too much alone, too much confined to the house. How long is it since you went for a walk?"

"Twelve year or more—wouldn't go out now if you paid me! Pretty scarecrow I'd look! And come back to find the place robbed—of the bundles I mean. I've nothing else, I'm frightfully poor!"

"A wonderful deal of good would result from a walk: for one thing, you would lose all these terrors you tell me trouble you at night."

"Good? I've been waiting for good too long! Don't want it now!"

"You should go out and seek it. It is quite useless expecting it to call upon us!"

"But it has to-night!" replied the old miser, with more softened accents. The Minister bowed, with a pleased expression. With much grave charity and composure he was accustomed to account for all the strange conduct and opinion

he met in the world, which, as long as he tenanted it, he did not expect to find joined with the nicety of an ivory puzzle, or toned and tinted with the harmonious delicacy of a Watteau.

Amy returned; and very pretty she appeared in the change of dress. True, the frock was some sizes too short for her sturdy limbs, but its colour in contrast with the rich brown of her hair and deep bloom upon her cheek was becoming and tasteful; the picture lighted up that humble room upon the instant.

"Well, this is a change—quite a fairy, I declare, and ready for a good supper?"

Thus the Minister, patting the glossy head, while the child simply looked her thanks.

"Poor little thing!" he thought, "I should like to know her story, and what has brought all this about!"

"Better sit down!" exclaimed Laban impatiently. "This ain't a Club, and we ain't often honoured with wisitors, or we'd get some furniter in; and you ministers ain't used to roughing it this way. Lord, how I hate the clergy!"

And without more ado Mr. Wix set about picking a chicken bone. Disdaining those luxuries of civilization, the knife and fork, he had taken the largest of the bones between finger and thumb, and was ravenously gnawing away at it.

The Minister saw that his little friend was liberally provided for. He contented himself with a hard biscuit, whereat Laban's eyes glistened with greedy satisfaction.

"You're a small eater, you are," he said, "you can come to supper often on these terms!"

"It will be your turn next, to come to supper with me."

"Don't go out—told you afore!"

"But I want to persuade you."

"I ain't to be persuaded! Call that bone picked, girl?" He snatched it away, and fell to picking it himself, then he laid it carefully on one side with the simple remark, "Soup to-morrow."

"Where are you going to put her?" asked the Minister, after supper, indicating the child.

"She'll sleep on some o' the bundles—my hammock's at the top!"

The Minister rose to go, bestowing a glance of kind pity, while taking the small hand and saying, Good-night.

"You'll allow her to come and see me to-morrow? I will walk home with her, and bring something for your supper."

"I don't mind on those conditions; and when you are about it you might make it enough for the next day's dinner!"

After their new friend had gone there was a dreadful stillness in the place, and the little girl's heart began to quake. There were such gloomy corners and grim nooks, such flickering and flitting of shadowy, shapeless horrors, she experienced a sense of strong overpowering terror; she noticed, moreover, that the old man became morose and silent. She cast slant looks on his furrowed face, hard-toned as some old Dutch masterpiece; she searched every wrinkle for one kinder and tenderer than the rest, but all were hard, and darkened over with an expression more chilling than the hardness. She ventured to cough, and he started as though a gun had gone off; she pushed the candle a little aside so that it could no longer shine upon the face, and it guttered and flickered and snapped as though it had caught the infection, and he glared upon that candle viciously. Down from the niches of darkly coloured wood, up from the tenantless basement, out from the cupboards and shelves came the uncanny company that troubled the old pawnbroker!

"I say," he gasped, with bated breath, "it's no good sitting here. I'll get to bed; do you drag out some o' the bundles, and put 'em on the counter!"

"I couldn't sleep there, all the things would see me; I'll creep into some corner. Shall you be *far* off?"

"Top o' the house; 'tisn't a lively walk to it either. You shall accompany me—in course, that's what I had you for; you'll soon run down agen."

And he strode off, the child trembling, pale with fear, and standing in as great dread of himself as of the ghostly horrors around. She ran after him, never daring to look behind her, and holding one little bit of his coat-tail between fingers and palm. There seemed no end to the twistings and twinings of

the ancient dwelling, all deserted save for the stores of property and dust-thick reserves untouched for ages. Their footsteps had a strangely muffled sound, and she seemed to hear a creeping in their rear. Chilled and so desolate, she could not restrain her tears; he turned upon her with smothered fierceness.

"If you don't leave off that snivelling, I'll pitch you out o' the window!" And he pointed over the strewn floor to where she could see the reflection of a street-lamp upon three moist balls dingily golden. She checked the sobbing, and they went higher and higher still, until just beneath the tiles was a cunning recess in which the old man concealed his valuables. It was here he made his bed, slung as upon ship-board, sacking and a moth-eaten blanket, and an unredeemed coverlet.

He gruffly said good night, and pushed close the garret-door, while the trembling child stood outside, unable to move from very fear; she crouched by his door, straining to catch the slightest sound, for even that would be company, would tell of something alive in the house. She buried her face in her hands to keep out the dreadful darkness, whilst her elbows rested upon her shaking knees. The rain pattering on the tiles made an unearthly fidgeting, the wind came soughing along the landing, the sign, hanging without, creaked with the gibbet rhythm, that most dismal of all the refrains of midnight. Somebody, somewhere, had put a flower-pot on the ledge of an upper window, and this blew down, and a tile went rattling after it, making "a devil of a din," to quote from Laban, who also heard it. The noise effectually broke the spell of horror that had bound the child, by leading her thoughts to others—some one had placed that flower-pot there, that some one was not so very far off, she would seek out the back windows. Houses were close together at this part, as she had noticed when in the yard below; she might see a light somewhere. What company it would be!

Gliding cautiously along the clammy wall, she came to a door; it was locked; her heart went down a little at that, while the swift feet of a rat pressed her foot as it ran over the eminence. Farther on, she nearly fell through an opening that yawned in her very path. She came to the stairs, and

paused, uncertain about descending—they were sure to creak beneath her footstep, the old man would be alarmed, might mistake her for a robber, perhaps sally forth with some deadly weapon—but it must be attempted; and, lightly as a fairy, she stepped over the perilous ground. Opening another door at the foot of the stairs, a gust of close, musty air, met her in the face; but there was no window anywhere that she could see, and she tried the adjoining door. Yes, there was a window, and three or four stars upwards, and the sorrowful, desolate child sat down in the centre of the litter scattered upon the floor, thinking of her mother, who might even then be cold and white under the great, grim river. She looked hard and with terrible yearning at those stars which, what with her tears and the rain, were sadly diluted before their rays reached to her heart. She felt so wholly woe-begone and miserable, and so given up, it required all the childish faith to go on looking for that window. It was no light matter turning out from that room again, so cheerless and intensely dark was all without. While feeling her way along the passage, she suddenly heard a sound that transfixed her with horror; it was a footfall, as light as her own, and then a panting, breathing, as something passed, close. All that she had suffered was as nothing compared with her feelings at this moment. Half suffocated, quivering with dread, in awful trepidation, she stretched forth her hands; they encountered the handle of a door, which she opened and darted through, straight to the window, which was open. Very near she saw the open window of an adjoining house, where a boy, who seemed to her even as an angel, was placing some pots of flowers upon the ledge, probably mindful of some favourites before the gentle rain was over. He was all in white; a light in the room seemed to shed a halo about the fair young head; the face, seen by starlight, was of infinite beauty. Without pausing to think of the dangerous nature of the act, with one little cry of warning, the girl flew straight to the saving arms, an astonished face bending over the nestled captive. It had all been done so quickly, it could not but be done with safety; in circumstances of instant peril it is

the wavering which destroys. Whoever she might be, however she came, the boy lent his tender protection, and held her firm until the fluttering heart was quiet, and the panting breath was still; then he softly closed the window and drew down the blind, by which time the little one was herself again and blushing finely, which of course made her look ten times as pretty. On this score there was not a pin to choose between them, for a more bewitching pair of faces could not well have been found in London. The boy was very young, not, perhaps, more than a year or so older than herself; yet exercising in this sudden and delicate emergency so much of grace and tenderness, a stronger and braver than our girl might well have been befooled into clinging to the angelic theory. He was so quiet with it all, with that sensitive tact so often found in boys, but seldom in girls; so soft with his words and ways, she could not have been more safe or more contented with the tenderest of women. Forming an impromptu toga with an Austrian blanket, the scarlet and blue stripes of which lent another foil to his beauty, he offered the visitor a low, easy chair beside the bed, while he enthroned himself upon the latter, contemplating, with admiring leisure and with perfect respect, the flushed little face before him; then he said with a charming smile,—

"We are always meeting strangely, Amy! Perhaps you will tell me what is the matter now, and how you came next door?"

"I've been left in pawn. Ah! I've known some trouble, Arthur, since I saw you last!"

"Not been ill again, I hope?"

"No, not been ill again; I've lost *him!* And since then, Arthur, I've belonged to just anybody!" She cried a little at that, and, all sympathy, the boy took the girl's hand in his, holding it warmly, and saying,—

"I am sorry for you, so sorry! What can I do to help you?"

"Take me somewhere from this place. I cannot go back to that house, it is horrible! I was nearly dead with fright when I heard the flower-pot fall, then I was so thankful, for it told

me there was somebody about, and I made for that side of the house and saw you, and *then* I knew that I was safe."

"Come a little nearer and tell me all about it; whisper, then it won't wake any one. I'm only here for a night or two, while Dr. Nichols's house is painted; they have gone to stay in Sussex while it's going on, and I have to tell visitors that the doctor will return very shortly. For any very urgent case I have to telegraph directly. I'm going to leave the doctor when they return; the life does not agree with my health. I think it's this close part of London after the country air I have been accustomed to; the doctor promises to try and get me into some other quarter, and, I hope, in some other form of employment. I don't like this. I've told the superintendent at my Sunday school."

"Good gracious! If you're not bringing that Sunday school up again!"

"Why not? I am happy there; and the superintendent is very kind."

He did not disclose the delicate motives of his wish to get away, to more perfect strangers than these relatives of the Blakes, amongst whom something was ever recurring to remind and sadden; nor did he enter into his longings for some superior form of life wherein he could acquire knowledge of that great and lofty kingdom of art and letters, whereby he might rise in the world to equality with those of whom poor Grandfather had told, yet from whom he was so alienated.

"But I want you to tell me about yourself," he said, "about your being *there!*"

"Oh, it's too dreadful!" with a shudder. "It makes me cold to think of; give me a corner of your blanket, will you, Arthur?"

"You can have another," said the boy proudly. She wrapped one about her, and cosy enough the pair looked, very like a brace of Esquimaux, in fact. And so the history was whispered, and she saw him start at mention of the Minister, respecting whose personal description and kindness he drank in every word.

"I think you've also met the gentleman who has been

so kind to me, who called to see Miss Rose at Dr. Nichols's!"

"Oh! Rose is her name? I've not forgotten how nice you look out walking! Well, suppose I *have* met with the same gentleman, you are not jealous?"

"No, Amy, but I'm going to his house in London to-morrow, and I was thinking, if I took you with me he might find you a home."

"He wanted to do so—I will go with you. I should like to live with him and you all my life!"

The sensitive delicacy of the boy was shocked by this candour; he flushed to the brow while saying,—

"That would not quite do, you know! But tell me of your escape. First, I think it was the miser himself you heard behind you. I know that he walks in sleep; he has dreadful nights, I believe. Last night, when I went to the window to gaze at my stars, I saw him, and he had a most frightened look, but I cannot tell whether he was asleep or awake. The poor old man must be very lonely!" Arthur spoke with great sadness; it revived thoughts of another who had been as lonely, but, Oh! so different!

"Tell me—why do you go to the window to look at the stars?"

"It is when I am thinking—thinking—thinking! Of a time before ever you knew me."

"Of a happier time?"

"Much happier; when one I loved would pat me on the head, and call me beautiful and good."

"Yes; I have had that time too! Now, I fear, gone for ever. But why *your* stars?"

"He first led me up to them, taught me to say prayers to the great God beyond them, explained all their beauty, and told me of all His love! And at those times I learnt to look with reverence at the stars, to look upon the sky as home; but since that I have looked—when they were to be seen—with affection, for it seemed his face was watching me: each night before my bed-time.

"And the flowers you think so much of?"

"Are from an old garden you would not care to pluck a piece of wallflower from, but which is dear to me as dear can be! I brought them here because of the paint; I shall take them wherever I go."

Bright, beautiful boyhood! Tarnished so soon, wounded so often, finding so few to understand it! Alone with its tender instincts, aloof with its loftier poetry, time of the highest hopes and most lovely tunes, of the sweetest dreams and purest thoughts; how beautiful is boyhood!

"And now, what are you to do, Amy? Of course, you can't remain here: and all the people are gone to bed." They were quiet trading folk, whom the doctor attended, and often sent lodgers to when the upper rooms were empty.

"I will just curl up in that arm-chair and go to sleep; I've slept in more chairs than beds in my time, but they haven't all been as comfortable as this. Good night, Arthur, and thank you!"

And before very long she had settled herself as described, and was fast asleep. This pair, motherless, fatherless, boy and girl, seemed thrown curiously in each other's way in this City of strange fellowships.

He extinguished the light and drew up the blind; the soft radiance of the starlight fell upon the girl's face, which, turned towards him, with parted lips, down-fallen lashes, and straying locks, looked piquant enough for a kiss. He went and kissed her; but it was in memory of that ideal sister yearned for so long. And when he went to sleep it was with his face turned to those self-same, coldly-glittering, unsatisfying, and unanswering stars.

CHAPTER II.

THE GENTLE PAGE.

Laban Wix, who had been on tour the greater part of the night, opened the door of the chamber to which he invariably returned after his nocturnal wanderings, and screamed harshly downstairs for the girl; she not answering, he went below and explored the whole place, thinking with a shiver of the money advanced upon this missing article. He examined doors and windows, searched the bottle-girdled wall, poked the unredeemed poker into all sorts of dark closets and cupboards, and skipped with a wonderful agility right up the stairs; and, finding her not, swore lustily, calling himself by many a violent name for having been weak enough to be taken in.

"I might a known she'd be off some night; it was all a do, and yet anybody would a bin taken in by her!"

Having searched for and found the Minister's card, he studied this with some surprise; he had not set foot outside for so long, even the name of the square where the esteemed preacher's residence was situated conveyed no significance of the locality. He believed the child had fled thither, and to ascertain if his supposition was correct became the difficulty to be surmounted. Leave the shop he could not, and he had nobody to send; but here an idea occurred to him, and he stealthily opened his shutters, shaking with the cold and with his teeth all chattering, while his wasted fingers clutched at the iron bars. The few chilly-looking mortals about frowned up at the sign at the corner, and hurried past old Wix as though he had been the devil himself. A coffee-merchant wheeled his tin apparatus

right to the front of the shop and invited the proprietor to partake of a cup. Mr. Wix turned upon him fiercely,—

"I can't afford to buy coffee. Coffee indeed! I wonder what next, and being robbed wholesale under my own roof!"

The merchant looked sympathetic; he was a red-faced, goodnatured-looking fellow. The sight of that redness exasperated the cadaverous Mr. Wix; the goodnature galled him, the sympathy caused him to fume to the roots of his scant grey hair.

"Robbed!" echoed the merchant. "Tell us all about it."

Mr. Wix was lowering one of his huge shutters; he pretended to stagger under its weight, and contrived to topple it on to where the head of that merchant would have been had he not leaped over the shaft of his machine. The merchant gave up Laban Wix, Pawnbroker, therewith, as a bad one, and would have treated an audience all round with a cup of thick coffee each, could they have assembled to view the owner dangling from his own exalted sign.

A cabman came along and shuffled to and fro at the door, handling some cotton pocket-handkerchiefs as though with an idea of purchase: once within, however, he removed from under his cape an elegant opera-glass, left, probably, in his cab. Mr. Wix was embracing his shutter very tightly when the man entered, and he trotted round with it to the niche where they were kept.

"What's that thing?" cried Wix, clutching greedily at the pearl and gilt trifle. "It's a lantern, ain't it?"

"It's a hopera—you knows well enough!"

"Chuck full on 'em—can't get into a room upstairs where they're piled to the ceiling; don't want it! Nought else?"

The cabman hesitated before restoring it to its concealment.

"Nothing on it, then?"

"Well, you see it's a'most useless; no trade for 'em hereabouts. You'll be driving West presently, and can leave it somewheres! Many on 'em likes taking these things in!"

The man made for the door without more pressing, and Mr. Wix, who had all along intended securing the instrument, fearful of losing it, called out,—

"Well, to oblige you, as it's a cold morning, and I dessay you've been out all night, I'll do what I can for ye. Let's have a look at it."

This customer was hardly out of the shop when a poor woman entered with her husband's boots; he was sick; these must be surrendered to obtain food. She told a pitiful tale, and the old man listened in silence, and she thought that even Laban Wix's heart was touched; ay, was there not commiseration in the kinder tone? Was he not of all unlikely men about to prove a friend? It seemed so to her sorrowing heart, all clinging to that straw.

"Well, my good woman, I'd like to prove a friend to you if I any way can; sorry for your case, very! Let me see if I can serve you! Can you read?"

"Yes," cried the woman eagerly; "they used to tell me I read beautifully!" A fair light shone on the worn face, a happier expression stole thereon; the old gentleman might be about engaging her to read the paper to him in the evening.

Mr. Wix handed the Minister's card to the woman with the curt query,—

"Can you read the title on it? Know where 'tis?"

The woman nodded.

"My little serving-gal has left me without warnin'—taken goodness knows what with her. I know he felt an interest in her—dessay can tell where she is—she may even be at his house. Bring her back, and I've a bran new shilling not wanted for the business which you're welcome to, upon bringing her back, but not without, not without. I should much like to help you, mum, if I can—very much." He was fumbling the said coin, removed from a small wash-leather bag; it was of a suspicious whiteness, and Laban knew it well to be anything but silver. He had been biding his time some years, awaiting the opportunity for palming it upon some unfortunate who would have no plea for returning it. Laban was sharer of that sensitiveness common to the isolated—the dread of trouble and dispute.

Very gratefully did the poor woman speed upon her errand, and Laban chuckled to himself over his goodness to the poor.

But when some time afterwards she returned, with news of failure, he became more grave and saturnine, asking hastily if she had not seen the Minister? Oh, yes, and he sent his compliments unto Laban Wix, but the child had not been there. He had also heard the woman's tale of poverty, and given her a sovereign to redeem the boots and procure some food for home.

"Confound that fellow!" muttered Laban Wix, "He'd upset all London if he could, and rob the poor an honest o' their living!"

"Don't think so, Master Wix! If there were more like him about, London 'ud be a mighty deal happier nor it is at present!"

"Oh, you're like all the rest, turn on the friends o' yer poverty in the day o' yer prosperity. Never knowed a person come into a fortin but it spoiled 'em! But you jist wait till you're down in the world agin, an' see how glad you'll be o' Laban Wix's!"

The woman hurried from the place with a shudder; to another home, which the Minister's charity, and cheering words more valuable than charity, had rendered sunny for the hour.

In candid truth Mr Garland was pleased at the information this woman's call conveyed, for it announced to him the child's escape; whither was for the time unknown, but it was evident she had made good her escape from pawn.

"Another quaint episode to add to my life chronicles! The generous-hearted and humane may well live on, live double lives and be in town and country both, so urgent is the need for friendly aid and sympathy on every hand. I pray *mine* are sheltered at this time by some fostering care, in memory of those I shelter! Loved wife and darling child, where are you now? And what sore retribution hath fallen on my head—that head which conceived the doubtful wisdom of this daring course, daily imminent with dread, and pregnant with discovery? But a little while, my Ella, a little while, and him whom you proudly loved, graced and honoured by fair fame, you shall love again, no cloud veiling the light in truthful eyes, no shadow on the brow, or in the home. I feel

sometimes as if, should we meet by accident, it would be more than my strength could bear; and Ella,—the effect of such surprise on her would be most fatal. I must guard her from this, although how to do so with no clue to their whereabouts is the problem I would solve; once do this, I will, by Lady Guilmere's aid, break the truth to her—it must be gently broken; but my greatest dread is that some ill chance may bring my loved ones to the South."

Mr. Garland was disturbed from this reverie by his servant, informing him that a young gentleman wished to know if it was convenient to see him, and the Minister felt glad.

"Yes, admit him!" He had invited the boy, being impressed by his manners. *He* knew the boy's deep longing, the aspiration for better things, the exquisite dreaming never told to a mortal; he read it all in the large eyes beneath darkly pencilled brows, eyes that seemed weighted by the mystic eloquence which is language only to a few, and he traced by outline of the physique the slumbering genius of the soul. Often he had met this gentle lad accompanying an old white-haired man bent and bowed, yet whom he believed to have seen better days; and to whom, as was evident, this boy flashed all the sunshine, laughed all the music the life had known; and because of this he had never offered to place the child in the path to better fortune, although the project had lain next his heart for months. But Westley Garland did not press his sympathy where likely to cause pain, or when inopportune; he waited, and somehow the time always came. He was too delicate and thoughtful even to hint that the boy might be better provided for, he said no word beyond a kindly greeting when he met them on the wide tract of Downland. Then he had the mortification of seeing his own thought and forethought circumvented altogether, and the boy whom he would have placed at school taken into service, to a good home he admitted, but not to the life he would have chosen. And then the boy was removed to the home in town, which Garland thought as objectionable as the other. Hence this invitation for some quiet talk together.

But now came a surprise, the boy timidly telling his friend all that had transpired. He had left the girl outside in the

square, until he knew if it was agreeable to Mr. Garland that she should be admitted; and he felt very happy at the Minister's manifest approval. Mr. Garland sent him for the child at once, and she was brought in blushing with pleasure. Arthur had expended his slender stock of money upon the pretty hat and jacket which rendered her presentable. For the rest she appeared as on the previous evening, and Westley Garland looked upon her with a large measure of pity.

"You did not think to see me so soon," he said, with his most tender smile, bending towards her and taking the curl-clustered head between his hands, while looking down thoughtfully. She was so different to his snow-flake! "Yes, my child, we will, indeed, see if a more suitable home than that from which you have fled, is open to so defenceless a one. Now run and make friends with my housekeeper, I want to talk awhile with your protector!"

Thus auspiciously was Amy installed in the Minister's good graces. With a little trembling, and half breathlessly, Arthur heard this kind remark, for now that the moment had come it seemed such wondrous boldness upon his part to be sitting in the presence of this great man. Arthur entertained the awe sensitive and shrinking boyhood experiences when alone with some one eminent and honoured. He had heard the doctor say that this famous Minister had no equal in the matter of popularity; and he remembered a night of his preaching in town, how he had heard the church doors were beset by a crowd that began to assemble long before they were opened; how aisles were thick with standing men and women, while many stood without, catching but the echoes, yet clinging to these greedily; and how after the service he had walked to the vestry, with down-cast eyes and pensive thought, yet with a majesty that was unapproachable, and the crowd had moved forth with a slow reluctance, and backward turning eyes, hoping for another glimpse of their favourite: and stood outside in groups, upon the chance of seeing him again when passing to his carriage; how when he knew of this, he would not keep one soul a minute waiting through vanity, but thought of the danger from the night air

to those thus waiting, and walked gravely down the church, accompanied by the wardens, bowing kindly and shaking hands with many: until he reached the pavement, where the police kept back the pressure. Glancing half nervously to right or left, not liking the publicity and scarcely understanding it, and sitting back in his carriage while the servant mounted to the box beside his coachman: and just before driving off, inclining his head slightly, in recognition of the homage, but with a tender smile, an exquisite grace, the crowd counted it well worth the waiting for. All this the boy had heard with feelings of timorous wonder, forming of the Minister a god-like, ideal hero, as boyhood will, not feeling he could *love* this wondrous man—he was too far removed for that, and the boy felt too great awe for love to be possible—but experiencing that touching devotion which renders even contact with the garments a thrilling moment that is almost pain. Thus when the preacher first spoke to him simply and kindly as might any man, nay, kinder than had any save one, now dead; Arthur knew what it was for the heart to stand still with dread and gladness, with hot yet cold excitement, tumultuous yet suppressed emotion. A feeling of temporary trouble, much lessened when the preacher deigned to notice him again, to lay his hand all tenderly upon the curly head; thinking, perchance, he had no son, but would have liked a son so gentle; and yet again when came the invitation to this friendly talk. The awe had not worn off; it seemed so great a condescension it was difficult to realize it all at once; himself, an atom, in the presence of this king in thought and popularity! He scarcely dared to lift his eyes to the calm face graven of trouble; tried almost to forget this moment had come; waited, hardly breathing, for the opening word. Spoken softly as a mother might speak, by him who had seen it all, "Come here, my child!"

The boy went to him trembling, and he just drew the trembler on to his knee, and kissed him upon the brow.

Arthur could not bear much; this was so unexpected, he burst into tears.

He felt dreadfully sorry to have done so, but could not help

it. The Minister did not attempt to check him; he knew the relief of tears to hearts that are overcharged; and those tears were higher tribute to this man than all the waiting crowds that had stood so often and so long. When calmer, the Minister talked to him; until the eyes sparkled, and the cheeks flushed, and Arthur was no more afraid; yea, knew that he had here a friend, even to the death. Mr. Garland certainly did not belong to the class who recognize nothing lower than palm-trees in the world.

Cool moss is thick and sweet each side the humble flower, the long dry summer through: the wind blows the waving grass to shelter it from harm, the trample of straying kine is close, but crushes instead the bleached stalk, useless, unlovely: the great bee which falls with cruel weight upon such slender things, buzzes past to the mound of wild thyme: the butterfly, even, with so gentle a theft, floats on the sunbeam hence: above it, is a slant roof of dock-leaf that carries off the rain-drops during rainfall. They, who inspect little nearer than stars, or lower than palm-trees, may sneer, blandly, at the humble thing watched over and cared for in its unnoticed way.

Who could tell but this boy would be one of the brotherhood whose fancy changes tedious hours to wingëd minutes: banishes memory of pain, hangs the world round with pictures: the thinkers who make wiser, and better, and brighter by their thought, who produce the great lasting work and leave their imperishable mark upon the ages: who educate the world and train thought itself: who gather the materials of the earth, of life, and of nature, into essences for the strengthening of souls; whose names are enscrolled in the archives of those to whom mankind owes the deepest debt: the debt children take of their fathers, and bequeath again for a sacred observance?

An encouraging word may sometimes mould a whole future destiny; the consciousness of a life's friend may make a character.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARTIST'S WOODLAND HOME.

When that luxurious Byronic art-patron, Frank Lord Ellerby, gave shelter to beautiful Bohemia, he only obeyed instincts and followed idealisms that had been through life a guiding influence, and no more powerful instance of this had occurred than was afforded by that memorable beauty-quest which led to his finding a very charming partner. A spoilt child of fortune, accustomed from cradledom to possess everything he set his mind upon, he yet was naturally, so refined, this licence had never been abused, and it may be affirmed in all candour that his lordship was as innocent as it is possible for a man and an artist to remain, in that world to which the Rev. Sydney Smith so delicately drew attention.

Yet his lordship had never once thought of the possibility of his young wife objecting to the woodland studio. Indeed if his lordship wished to have a studio in every wood in Europe, it might never have occurred to him that it was just possible such a proceeding would be rated, if artistic, as improper! He had known men give up the Meet and forswear Steeple-chasing, owing to their necks becoming so much more valuable, but then his neck was not in danger. He had also known men quarrel with their Club, but he didn't belong to a Club. He was all Art, it was the first principle of his life; and he would as soon have thought of breaking up the establishment in Brighton or Paris, as that exquisite nest amongst the fragrant pines.

Indeed he loved this retreat from the world of fashion and gaiety, with its gems from French *salons*, and rarest speci-

mens of native talent, leaving out altogether the far from obscure work of his own; where Gérôme was sensuously classical, and Gallait grandly historical; Jules Breton's pastorals side by side with some masterpiece of Meissonier's, and the rich glow upon Italian studies contrasting with the severe purity of the Northern school. Perhaps he had now and again thought, if but one of the lovely creations crowding the gallery beneath the cones would but come to life upon his bidding, how pleasant it might be; but he had fastidious notions, and if likely to upset his place, interfere with the hangings, or pass remarks upon those specimens not designed for the eyes of the vulgar (even resuscitated vulgar, around whom a halo had been shed while on the canvas), why then he would leave them as they were, in their frames, quiet and inoffensive, and always charming.

When 'Walter' glided upon the scene, delicately as if woven of shreds of starlight, beautiful as any Ganymede that ever tended flocks on Ida, daintily sensitive, and all shrinking like one of those tender hues wherewith he painted some veiled Aurora, yet possessed of that indescribable charm which is the seal set upon birth;—then the artist felt that the picture long thought of had to some extent taken form, and the familiar of his flights into cloudland had descended amongst the firs: as in old legends of German woods told by some pretty peasant, while he leisurely sketched the scene. He was almost surprised into mournfulness by that softness of beauty, chaste as the softness of pathos in marble; he was caught and enslaved in the toils of an elegant admiration, slight as a lacework of ivory; he was charmed by this rare picture of nature, that stood forth as though carved upon agate, and in his artistic fashion he endowed this high relief with grace that was haughtily sweet; and whether as goat-boy of the Tyrol, or gondolier's son of Maggioré, or what else it might be his pleasure to depict, that idealism was there. In Lord Ellerby's opinion the melancholy did not in the least detract from the beauty, or take one gleam from the light of that face. Cypress in marble is lovely as orange flower beneath the tinting from mediæval windows, and this idealist knew well

that troubled music blooms in the heart of many a song. The chief wonder appeared to be how 'Walter' could have preserved this delicate refinement through all that had occurred. Lord Ellerby had heard the story of her birth, and was profoundly interested; and he thought it no wonder that the child was sad. "What a world this is!" he said to himself, while adding the finishing touches to one of those studies wherein the fugitive played pathos, and shed soul; "What strains float and linger, and fade and die, all unknown and unheard, day after day; blown hither and thither like torn blossoms in an orchard during time of storm, sensitive and pure as shreds of silver in the sea! I like this boy's eyes that might wear the tender splendour of dead love, that *do* leap to flame beneath the higher thought when I talk to him of art: his hands that lie in my own with no unfeeling cold white beauty, but that wear in their palm the warm bloom which means so much in pressure: that cool languor like some crystal lake with myriad unstirred depths; those tears when he weeps as regal women weep, with tears that are jewels upon sorrow that is queenly. Will He who shelters the flower-seed dropped into the darkness, and brings it forth in sunlight a blossom of fair splendour, forget this rarer flower fallen in loveliness so helpless and unprotected? I think not; any way he shall never want a friend in Ellerby! He can remain here, it is a quiet, secluded home for him; some day I will send on one of these pictures to Brighton, just to see what Flora thinks of it. The fellows will be awfully jealous! It will be 'Ellerby has unearthed a treasure somewhere!' and 'By-the-bye, where's Frank Ellerby's studio? I want to find out, if I can, whether this new face is from the life, or one of his erratic dreams!' Oh yes, they'll be nicely put about, but I'll keep this to myself!"

This was all very well and charmingly ideal so far as it went, and so long as they were alone; but that day when Lena came in with 'Walter,' a new period commenced, a peculiarly dangerous period, for of course to admire 'Walter' was to love Lena; and in a confidential whisper to himself

the artist admitted, with characteristic drollery, "Some fellows say they have been looking all their life for the beautiful, and can't find it; but I seem to stand the chance of having too much of it in my artistic career."

Lord Ellerby was in his choicest retreat when the pupil was seen walking down the wooded lane accompanied by a girl, and from the distance a pretty girl; the walls were lined with them, pedestals surmounted by the most exquisite beauty human mind was capable of conceiving, the very windows stained with fair saint-faces that rebuked the classic licence; the carton-pierre painting that served for decoration was set with the daintiest heroines of the poets. He looked round the chamber contentedly, looked out to the shady lane dissatisfied, he did not approve of disciples running wild and picking up strange nymphs, not allowed in Attica, and why here? He resolved to model his academy upon severely classic precedent, and with accustomed negligent grace sauntered forth to ascertain the meaning.

'Walter' blushingly brought forward her companion, who was not blushing, but gazing with full and undisguised admiration at the handsome painter. Willie Arden—well, Willie Arden was not forgotten, and never would be, no matter what number of handsome painters she encountered upon her way.

"Who is this, young sir?" inquired his lordship kindly.

"The young lady is tired with walking, sir, and faint with hunger. I felt sure you would allow her to sit down and rest awhile!"

"Certainly I will, and see that refreshment restores her strength before she leaves us. This is Hospitality Hall, my dear" (to Lena), "and we suffer no wayfarers like yourself to pass whenever we can extend our kindness. Come in, and the maid shall show you to a chamber where you may remove the dust clouding your pretty hair," lifting the luxuriant blown tresses hanging about her wild as some bewitching gipsy's.

Lena thought all this very pleasant, and a most agreeable change, and she obeyed his injunctions to the letter. She

returned shortly, looking about her curiously, for this bachelor Parisian abode was as different as possible to the chaste magnificence of the House upon the Cliff. But Lena was entirely innocent, and construed no wrong of these poetic studies; wondered a little perhaps, and may have thought next time she met Willie Arden she would press the allegory of Men and Maids.

"Welcome to an idle painter's workshop, young lady!" was her host's merry greeting, as, hearing her step upon the stair, 'Walter' opened the door, and the artist raised himself a little upon his luxuriant couch, and laid down the long Persian pipe he was smoking, which recalled St. Aubyn to her mind. The child almost loved this smoker for the resemblance; the fragrance of the Eastern weed revived memory of old rooms at home. Well, she felt to be on the way now, and what a string of adventures to tell the dear one to whom she was returning! And she thought she must be quick about the journey, or he would arrive home first. And once or twice she thought how pleasant it would be to have this charming boy, who had been so good a friend, to accompany her upon the way! She would give much could St. Aubyn but see his fair girl face.

Upon a side-table refreshments of a light and tempting kind were in waiting, and the artist placed her at ease by saying,—

"My 'Walter' here was just about to have his luncheon, I am sure you will assist him at his task."

"I shall be glad to," said Lena simply, "for I'm most wonderfully hungry!"

The artist looked keenly at the speaker through a blue grey cloud. The words might have proceeded from some one of the vagrant *gamins* with sloe-like eyes and raven locks amongst whom he had scattered bonbons on the wharf or landing-stage by the Seine; but the voice was musical and proud with all its childishness.

The girl and boy-girl sat opposite one another, eating and eyeing each other's face and movements very much as you may see a pair of half-shy, half-bold, and altogether pretty kittens over a plate of milk. The chamber redolent with aroma of the

woods, with fragrance of the artist's clouds, and with odour from basins, where fountains played perfumed waters over rocks and feathery fern.

"You are not asked to tell us anything about yourself, young lady, because you accept our hospitality; but if you like to do so, we lend an attentive ear; and remember, please, if we can be of any service it will give us pleasure." Said without effort and with so much genial *bonhomie* and frank sincerity, Lena replied instantly; and it was so amazing a reply the artist removed the pipe from his mouth and looked long and earnestly at this venturesome little pilgrim,—

"I've been walking about London all night, and now have set forth upon the road to York!"

"Good gracious! What a queer idea! But do you mean what you are saying?"

"It is true. I came from home yesterday morning to see London, and I have seen it, and don't think much of it. More than that, I am *disappointed*. I've been looking all the time for a real live Lord or Lady, and I don't believe I've seen one yet."

The artist smiled kindly. "I suppose you do not often make these little explorations?"

"I have never been away from home before; I daresay I shall get into a pretty bother through being away now."

"Well, if you belonged to me, I should very much object to it. By-the-bye, whom *do* you belong to, if not too bold a question?"

"To Mr. Ashton St. Aubyn, of the House upon the Cliff."

"And in what part of the world may the Cliff be situated?"

"In Yorkshire—whither I am going as soon as ever I can!"

"I thought my acquaintance with cliffs was pretty general, but it seems I have yet to learn. Do I understand you are absent 'without leave'?"

"Oh yes, I dared not do so if—if Papa knew: he is very particular."

"Well, you have taken a wrong step to begin with. And how may it have fared with you?"

"Roughly; I don't want to do it again!"

"Then the lesson hath done good!" and the speaker smiled to her over the morality. "When you have finished your lunch come here, for I want to have a good look at you."

She walked over to him, hanging her head with pretended penitence, but looking from out the corners of her eyes with irresistible wickedness. And he looked long, kindly and thoughtfully, and then said with comical perplexity,—

"I want to scold you, but I don't know how: and I suspect if I did it wouldn't do you much good."

"Not a bit; I've been scolded lots of times, and it never does me any good!"

"Well, you strike me as being an original. I wonder what Lady Flora would think of you?"

"Lady Flora—really Lady Flora?"

"Yes, really! A lady I know in Brighton."

"Where is Brighton? Is it far?"

"Not very."

"I should like to go—like to see Lady Flora!"

"I'm afraid if you were to go, and under my chaperonage, it would create some commotion. You would cause almost as much excitement as did my friend Lady Helen!"

"Lady Helen—Lady Flora—what a lot of ladies you seem to know! I should think you would be the very one to let me see some of them."

"It is not such an extraordinary request, and I am not aware that there is any great difficulty attending it. But I thought you were in such a hurry to return home?"

"So I am. I am always wanting two things at once. I should like 'your Walter' to go a little way with me, if you do not mind!"

"What! Run away with my pupil? A pretty thing!"

"Is he your pupil? How I wish I could teach something, for I should like to have a pupil like that!"

"I dare say you would; one of your most happy lessons, I imagine, would be to teach him how to love."

"I hope you are not going to launch forth upon one of Mrs. Brandon's themes?"

"I have not the honour of knowing Mrs. Brandon."

"She lives with us, takes care of me, and gives lectures, gratis, upon Love!"

"What a funny girl you are! Uncultivated as a young colt. You want breaking in, you know."

"I should like to see some one attempt it with me! But upon cultivation I beg to correct you, sir; I will speak to you in Hindustani, Hindi, Sanscrit, Persian, Bengali, Arabic, Teeloogoo, Tamil, Guzrattee, Mahratta, and Malay."

"Now, I beg you won't! But where on earth did you pick up all those heathenish languages?"

"At home! Papa understands those and a lot more, and he amuses himself with drumming them into me; but I'm not a very apt pupil I'm afraid; would you like to try me?"

"No, thank you! I don't know anything I could teach you; it seems to me you already know too much."

"Teach me as you are teaching 'Walter'—to draw and paint. Oh! if I could but do that, I should be so happy!"

"I shall be pleased to make you happy, then; but remember, if Ashton St. Aubyn, your Papa, of the House upon the Cliff, wants explanation and satisfaction, it's your affair, not mine. Of course you can stop as long as you like. Since I've commenced a *pension*, I may as well extend its operations to the utmost. Perhaps, now, you have some friend you'd like to join you at your studies?" with playful and pleasant irony.

"Yes," cried the girl quickly, "Sir Dickson Cheffinger."

"Another friend of yours I have not the privilege of being acquainted with; the only Cheffinger I know is Claude Cheffinger of the Abbey. That's a painting of the old place, yonder, in the carved oak frame; mark the deer in the park—finest herd in the kingdom. I said to Cheffinger one day, when staying with a party at the Abbey, 'If ever you part with the estates, let me have the deer.' He turned disagreeable, I remember; of course I only meant it as a joke; but they certainly are matchless; one of the half-untamed species rapidly becoming extinct; just look at that fellow barking the ash with his antlers. I never tasted venison, like that upon the table at Cheffinger!"

It seemed so strange, the name now familiar to her being bandied about like this; she looked at the painting with much interest.

"And you did that?"

"I did."

"Then teach me; I would copy that for Sir Dickson!"

"Whatever for?—To tantalize? Nay, but you must abandon all such mischievous practices before becoming my pupil."

Presently he asked, "What name are you known by? What am I to call you?"

"Lena, please."

"Would you like to go round and look at the pictures, Lena? I shall be busy for an hour or two upon the canvas."

"I should, very much—and may 'Walter' explain?"

"To be sure." And as the two went off, roaming his "arbour of the arts," as he sometimes called this *bijou* home, he said to himself, "As interesting a pair of foundlings as one might desire Arcadia to provide. I'll sit down before getting to my picture, and write Flora all about it."

And he did so; wrote a humorous and slightly impassioned letter descriptive of events, and the beauty of his "brace of pupils," closing with terms of warm endearment addressed to his young, flower-like wife, and an artistic flourish to his signature "Frank." He read this over, read it again, read it as one might read it in Flora's place, and, tearing it up, sat down to write another; and wrote another, commencing with terms of warm endearment addressed to his young wife, these grew cooler towards the centre, where he cautiously felt the way with "And now I am going to tell you of a most romantic occurrence which will interest you more than any part of my letter, and which, when you see some studies I am working upon, will rouse your wish to see the originals." Then some dozen lines further, this diverged into a slightly impassioned description, closing with terms of great enthusiasm, depicting the beauty of his "brace of pupils," and an additionally artistic flourish to his signature, "Frank;" and he read this over, read it again, read it as one might read who

was not artistically enthusiastic, and tore this up also. Then over the tobacco he recited this moral :—"The Ancients preserved knowledge of accidents; among Moderns preservation is an accident of knowledge! Through all time man hath shown his greatest wisdom when knowing least. I will be silent, until by word of mouth I can reply to all the innumerable questions my letter would bring, and which a complete system of Reuter and letters voluminous as the *Times* would be unable to embrace." After this he set to work upon his painting with vigour, and did some splendid work between the morn and the meridian.

Meanwhile Zephyrus and Chloris were happy amidst the poems spelt from spice-wood rafters to the wainscot, and the ingenious vivacity of the one found its echo of companionship in the settled charm of manner of the other. One knew so much; the other knew so little; each possessed attraction for the other; the manners of each were so gently winning, so innocent and lovable.

'Walter' stood by Lena, who was sitting upon a couch, examining some antique cabinet china upon a table, beside which she had placed herself.

"These are very pretty, you know! I never saw anything like this before."

"Have you not? I should have thought you had lived in the midst of such all your life, you are so delicate."

"Oh, do you think so? Mrs. Brandon used to tell me I was more like a boy than a girl, rolling about the floor, and bird's-nesting on the Cliff!"

A deep colour had dyed the other's cheek, noticing which Lena exclaimed,—

"How pretty you are when you blush, just for all the world like a piece of this!" She was indicating a superb *Grès de Flandres*, the gems of the collection.

"My life has for years been little better than that of the poor ones of whom you have just told me—I mean those who so interested you last night in Covent Garden. Think what it is to be the common apprentice of the common Circus!"

"What is a Circus? Tell me."

"A tanned ring, round a high pole, supporting a canvas roof, which forms a movable building; this is transported from place to place for the amusement of the people: horses canter round, and riders, male and female, go through feats of horsemanship, whilst jesters and buffoons make the audience laugh! That is a Circus."

"Thank you; I am wiser than before you commenced! I think I should rather like it, so that's the difference between us. What did you have to do?"

"Ride like the rest,—sometimes alone, sometimes in company!"

"And haven't you done anything else?—Been articled to a firm of solicitors, for instance?"

"No!" answered the other, with an alarmed look; "Why do you ask that question?"

"Because it is very strange." And she repeated from memory,—"'A fair-faced, delicate youth, with blonde curls short to the head; a slight, symmetrical figure; small white hand; timid, shrinking manner, very sensitive; age between fourteen and fifteen; and answers to name of Walter Gordon.' If that isn't your portrait, my name isn't Lena St. Aubyn!" And she triumphantly transfixed her victim.

'Walter' stood discovered, and by this exquisite detective, whom she was half disposed to embrace; yet with something of a scare at heart, although outwardly quiet.

"Well, I'm not going to be hard upon you, 'Walter,' because goodness knows I may be in the same shoes myself. Now you go back home; you're to be let off, and to be a good boy, and never do it again; only, you must first agree to give me up the papers belonging to Sir Dickson Cheffinger, and, second, to give me a real, genuine kiss! I was defrauded of one the other day by my friend, Willie Arden, so perhaps you'll make up for it."

'Walter' made up for it; and Lena sat considering; comparing as it were; then she said,—

"Seems to me there's something wanting: I don't blame you, Walter,—you did your part very well, but, somehow, I am not quite satisfied."

"I shouldn't think there can be much that is wanting; *you* have a good, kind Papa, but what have I to live for?"

"Well, I suppose we live for other things besides good, kind Papas; or, at all events, I do!"

What a play of cross purposes it was! And 'Walter' felt grieved by that, so apparent, heartlessness.

"And don't you," she asked, "remember either of your parents?" Thinking how much alike were their fortunes.

"Yes; I well remember my haughty mother, whose studied grace of movement and majestic carriage were the terror of my early years. I dared not love her, I am not quite sure that she loved me; it is my father I think of most, because he was so lovable although so grand. Have you ever read of King Solomon?"

"Yes!"

"Did you ever try to think what he was like?"

"No!"

"I have often thought my father like King Solomon, for he was wise and wealthy, beautiful and gracious."

"My Papa is thoughtful, and I know he is rich, yes, and beautiful, and gracious; so I think mine will do for King Solomon as well as yours!"

Mere idle chatterers in an artist's woodland home, mere gossips met in fairyland, unconscious and unknown. How the summer rose-leaves fall upon each other's path with careless splendour, yet perhaps with symmetry ruled by an all-presiding hand! How the silver grains are shifted by each rippling current when angle is to angle awkward, yet fitting by the afterflow of time and tide until in exquisite proportion!

"And your Mamma?" asked 'Walter.'

"My picture, I am afraid, is similar in this. I cannot recall much love, but instead, a calm and tranquil lady, haughty, cold, and cruel; bitter of word and freezing in manner; but so beautiful! Even like some Empress of a Court of great magnificence."

They wandered through room after room, one understanding about as much as the other of art, and the priceless worth of

the paintings they looked upon; but one understanding very much of the significance of theme and subject hidden from the childlike innocence of the other.

And when the artist discovered the pair, it was not before one of the fine conceptions that were his pride and pleasure, but sitting away in the quietest of the rooms by the window, and looking out thoughtfully upon the trees thinned of foliage, upon the array of divers-coloured leaves spread as a carpet, upon a vista of bared branches that shone grey and fawn and leaden, upon the lane leading thence to the highway for the North. And Lena was just saying, "I do so wish you would go with me!" when the artist merrily intruded.

"That's it, you see, trying to rob me of my pupil; now that is not fair!"

Lena rose with inimitable seriousness; and, advancing a step with playful indecision, yet with a gleam of the old imperious firmness which in the House upon the Cliff had been predominant, she said,—

"'Walter' has told me you are a Lord, really and truly. Please, may I look at you here in the light?"

"What, you have found one, then, at last? Ah, well, you do not find me so very distinct a being from a gentleman, I hope?"

"I've not had time enough to tell yet; it takes longer acquaintance to find that out!"

"Quite a philosopher!"

"I ought to be; I've had some precious lessons."

"Talking of lessons, I am going to take you for a drive to see some paintings."

"I've seen enough to last me all my life, thank you!"

"The paintings I speak of are different to my poor collection; you shall see one of the famous galleries of London!"

"I would rather not go back to London; I must be making for home when I do set forth."

"Then you won't go for a drive with me?"

"I don't mind if 'Walter' goes!" And she added to herself, "I've had a great wish to sit in a carriage, just once."

After luncheon she heard a couple of prancing horses on the gravel drive, and from the window saw the creatures—a handsome pair, that seemed to champ and neigh with delight at the prospect of a long chase over dry, hard roads. Then Ellerby seated his visitors opposite to him on the luxurious side, girt in with bear-skins, their feet in warmth of Russian foxes, looking so lovely, he rested back at ease, revelling, as was his wont, before such sweet visions; not even remarking a grey-bearded patriarch of impressive mien who held open the gate at entrance of the lane. It was Jael-Ishmael, King over Gipsy tribes in England, and from below the palmer hat his keenly glittering eyes shone like sparks of fire. The venerable form was erect as one of the poplars of the plantation, and did not bend while the artist-lord drove past, but took swift glance from right to left above the bear-skins, the last gaze while the carriage drove through lingering upon Somebody's daughter.

And then the ancient walked with dignity to the camp of a tribe of his people, picturesquely situated amongst the tree-trunks that columned their retreat, and canopied a fretwork of grey and of fawn and of leaden.

The people formed a rude circle round a fire (where, by-the-bye, the poetical caldron was conspicuous by its absence, for their chief was far too fastidious to permit cooking messes when he was in the woods).

A stable-rug was thrown over a heap of brush and thicket, and he sat thereon.

"Esther! Hath Esther sold of her ware?"

A woman of striking beauty approached; she wore a large red cloak that partially covered a basket upon her arm, which appeared stocked with the usual merchandise of the country haberdasher; she merely stood before him awaiting his bidding.

"Hast reduced thy store, my daughter?"

She stooped, taking up a card of linen buttons from which some dozens had been cut; a small tray of needle-packets, rows of blue-papered pins, which she unrolled, displaying different lengths; flat folds of Valenciennes lace, pieces of tape,

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and some woollen cuffs. One by one displayed reduction in their quantity.

"It is well. What more?"

She stooped yet lower, with the upper division of her basket removed; there were ear-rings and rings, brooches and necklets, pins and guards, lockets and charms, and all the array of mock jewellery precious to the unsophisticated mind ruralwards; each card she displayed showed some removal or other; but while bending over these she was not talking of this prosperous success, but whispered,—

"*The bolt upon the kitchen door can be reached by a long arm through the small window opposite the dove-cot. The inner kitchen door has a lock, no bolt.*"

"Thou hast done well, my daughter!" The woman replaced her ware and moved silently back to her station, where a little one was asleep, his head pillowed upon an ass, and his chubby arm about its neck.

Meanwhile the carriage-party was enjoyably *en route*. Anon, Kensington was reached, and they strolled for an hour amongst the paintings; the attendance was not large but select. Ellerby, naturally, was interested in one or other of the artists, known or unknown to him, who were at their studies before the great canvas from which they copied; and they came upon one of these, an elder at his art, who, intent upon his work, and busied guiding a boy-pupil at his side, did not look up at their approach—knowing well, if he looked up at every curious body prying at his work, he might do nothing more; but the boy did so,—and with a sunny face: itself more glorious than any picture in that gallery—and started from his chair to grasp the hand of 'Walter,' who, flushing a hundred pretty hues, was not less pleased.

And while Lord Ellerby shook hands with an old friend and interchanged the compliments, 'Walter' stood by that friend's pupil, when many hurried questions were replied to, and Lorry was introduced to Lena, who thought to herself wonderingly, whether any two boys upon the earth could be at once more opposite, more handsome, than the two before her.

And Lorry, with pretty manner and a breeding peculiarly his own, made friends with Lena.

"I say," said Ellerby to 'Walter,' "what a one you are! You will make my gallery a numerical success anyhow. You must return and dine with us," he added, to his friend, who readily assented. A pleasant ride back; the old friends chatting upon art, the young friends upon nature. Lorry sat by 'Walter,' and the two were soon engaged in more earnest conversation. There was much to be told, and even Lorry's surprise at thus suddenly encountering the original of the portrait in his possession, did not restrain his eagerness to learn all that had befallen 'Walter' in the meantime. He did not approve of his friend's refuge, and considered the pursuit of art under existing circumstances slightly a mistake, and said so. When 'Walter' answered with innocent candour, "After all I have gone through, this home, this life, is the perfection of happiness!"

"Yes, but at the farm you will have one of your own sex for company, and a kind, motherly lady into the bargain."

"That is of less moment to me than you would imagine; it is protection and consideration I need and value most; this privacy is very welcome, and I might not enjoy it at the farm."

So Master Lorry was troubled, his great beautiful eyes scanned the other's face with loving anxiety, and he half wished this captivating wanderer had never crossed his path. "It's a trouble to be fond of a girl when she is a girl, but when she's a boy it's positively unsettling!" Thus said the young philosopher to himself, his dark cheek tingling beneath Lena's openly admiring gaze.

Later on Lord Ellerby's friend returned to town; Lorry accepted an invitation to remain and spend the morrow with them.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE NIGHT'S WORK.

The great grey bridge was cold and grim as the stone of a line of mausoleums. Below, the river, sable as Styx, glided as bearing freightage of the dead; a barge-like trail of clouds above, keeping course with the sluggish stream—slowly, gradually, composedly passing on and away to a dim and mystical beyond. A weird fancy comes to one who is leaning elbows on the bridge, watching the dark old stream: a strangely vivid fancy with its accompaniment of phantom shapes, its pageant of grey pain, its layer upon layer of startling story. Suppose the ooze and mud of Thames to be giving up its secrets, the revelation of the river for the first time disclosed; and what records would be read in the procession of memories thus laid bare! An imaginary picture merely, yet full of strange suggestiveness!

Tide back the water for a season, far above bridges there! Ay, let vessels ground awhile, and traffic of the night be stayed. Bring cunning men with line and plummet, and pick and spade, and barrow and basket; clear off the mud and filth, tenderly wash white faces, deal gently with the matted splendour of blonde and brown that fathers have twined lovingly; bring cloths, and ewers of ware and of silver, and water scented of roses; dip the hands reverently, and lave with tenderness, till rings glide off and the colourless almonds flush; bring carrion carts and pageantry of the pest-house; bring trays for the jewels and caskets for the treasures, we will burnish these, learn of the dead gold graven of tears! Bring scavengers to clear the garbage-strata; bring cushions

of snowy velvet, with blossoms to scatter o'er the infants, and choicest weavings of your looms to gird about the children. These bitter winds pierce chill to-night between the arches of the bridge. Bring archives of old times, for deep down are men who have been there a thousand years or more; and deeper yet are relics of the days when savages fought on these banks, for teeth of beasts; a hideous company. One can see them crouching for the rush, gliding with sinewy movement, lithe, lank limbs and blood-sodden fangs, at their prowling ravenous sports, at their coiling, unclean minuet upon the banks where wharfage now rears another forest. Bring savants here to-night, men of science, intimate with the extinct ages, historians and men of museums, to whom a fossil is a treasure. There is much here, and other than geology. Bring sappers and miners, borers, and those who excavate, diggers and delvers also, and the skilled hands that tunnel their native clay. There is work here, the two thousand years' residuum has to be cleared by morning! Clever men of the note-book come, for to-morrow all the City shall be startled hearing of this. Carefully now, if you please! Is there a chemist at our elbow? Good fellow; search the pharmacy for that which will add bloom to these young cheeks! We have sponged off the crust of this foul stream, and see, there is *beauty;* are there means of restoring the colour? Long before Ishmael scattered desert roses amongst the swart girls charmed by the splendour of his face, this child played her boy-warrior false; centuries before Tiber witnessed the cradledom of Rome, this beauty, more savage than her wolf-cub playmates, floated acorn fleets hereon, and plunged all her ruddy swoop of limb on chase adown the stream. Lay these cold, brown lines of loveliness in symmetry one with another; they were straggling all awry in that grimy bed, and a horrid reptile of noisome breed nestled on the tawny, wet, bruised bosom. There are strange contrasts here to-night! Place it beside this sister of our later day, who has scarcely felt the cruel blow of the water strike her eyelids a cycle of the hours! Mark the small cross at her throat, the flower-like pretty face, the skin snow blue as wintry clouds; loop the locks

up lovingly. A mother ere this has taken the tired head on knee, and wound the hank of auburn silk for slumber. We will erect no grisly morgue this night; the recovered of the Thames shall have a fairer housing; the echo of the dirge died with its ebb and flow, pæan of awakened life shall chime in the dawn to each: list, even now there creeps upon us, as we lean upon the bridge, echo of girl laughter, glad, and like ringing of jewels, and it comes from the house far up the river, with laced windows to the lawn, where a nest of a chamber is shadowed by flowers all the length of the summer days; and we see this young fair love, radiant on her birthday morn, sunbeams kissing, odorous breaths of the flowers all fanning her beauty; and a grave man, bent by the City life, and stern with long years of law, but of a wonderful tenderness this day when alone with her. She is to have anything, even to the half of his kingdom of love; and the river is chosen; a row upon the lazy, playful, pleasant, musical old river, with fruits and bon-bons, and kisses, and flowers—curls dancing in the breeze, bared arms, lolling and lounging and leaning, and then—*overboard*, swift drinking up of the warm little morsel, as though the river thirsted for the sacrifice, and the closing again of the limpid sheet—a white face looking up farewell and fearless, while the wall grew thicker between it and the sky; and she is here to-night, lovely as of yore by the light of yon old stars, before the massed gloom of the trail of barges falling with infinite tenderness. Yes, place these together, they are one now. Fall back, ye artists, these are no models for your craft, go to the lusty and the strong, filled with song as the birds are, and laughter as these were! The children of light and of colour are yours, this grim nursery hath none of them.

What are they bending over, down by the old pile, their circle of lanterns lighting up the scene?

The grapnel of the pioneers is raising wicker-work of modern build, a basket borne by the stream from meadows where cottage gardens slope to its brink. Some child, perchance, essayed a vessel and found the thing float forth, as treasures do: it is entangled by the brick and cord or other

weight upon some feline pet drowned at night, a soft furred joy of grouped tearful ones around the fire that seems colder and duller; its coat of many colours gleamed on the hearth-rug, the most lovable bit of furniture in the place, until one night the man came home, in anger, and did this deed for a small theft such things often make, and scared little faces saw it torn from their protecting grasp and thrown to the cold, cruel river; by which they watched all night with the dumb pain of young bereft of the darling. Place it on the flags, not loathingly, once it was a link.

A commotion there—by the green moist boarding and brick, where sewerage of the warehouses trickles its noisome course in search of the parted waters: they are raising the gaunt, brass-burdened Roman, a mud-encumbered shield on his arm, spear blows still upon the mail and plates, warrior majesty stern on the face, and a glory of gold below the scarlet Eagle; hand to hand he may have fought the great Caractacus, the spiked club of the Briton have ruddied the river for an hour.

And gently now, 'tis a slender form, surely the sweetest ever flown from the Bridge of Sighs to the shoreless; an old notebook still in the pocket, with leather all peeled and parted, but a letter fresh and sad as can be, with the force of an old reminder: from a father somewhere away who has smoked his pipe in the ingle-nook with lowered head a long time past, with wistful longing in the honest eyes for other ties than these that snap all down the years. And her hand clutches hard at the pocket as clinging to the last to *something from there!* "Fashioned so slenderly!" They used to shelter that frail bosom from cold and damp, and girt it close with flannel, now look! No wonder the winds howl down the courts and alleys, and rattle the hoists and chains to gibbet symphonies. Mark the horrid swarm of rats that feed on such as these. Oh, dainty meat for unclean vermin of the Thames! Mark the archway reptiles crawling from dank and fœtid crannies, the shapeless horrors of this ghastly channel, staring with bleared eyes at the lanterns and blinking with wonder. They have had it their own way so long, this upset utterly perplexes them. A pretty thing this stirring up of the river! Better, you think,

the luxurious boudoir, with its perfume and elegance, than this raking up of the fare of a menagerie of terrors!

They have fished up an old iron caldron, of classical type well known below the greenwood. Whence comes this? Thrown hither by roving troop of nomads driven to these narrow ways by City banks, or has the bargeman's dame cast this as worthless from her cabin's little space?

Raise them with care, good sir! Knit pain, twin sorrows, linked drama of despair; two—boy and girl, arms wound, dead heart to heart, ice lip to lip, blended threading of soaked hair, twined fingers, palm to palm; pathos this, if ever! Are they brother and sister, perished amid the desolateness of the grim great City that had no hand, of all the millions, for them? Are they boy and girl lover, who walked to this adieu of grief, seeking rest together with a kiss and a clutch, while the water closed and the gas-lamps paled, and a new strange music filled their ears? Nay, part them not; life closed for them with strong stern song; we are ignorant of its history, but this tragedy in sculpture is sufficient.

Cast not that old brown hat aside with such contempt, it is more glossy than for many a long day before it took, beaver-like, to the water, and yet it has evidently weathered many storms. It is battered, crownless, and wanting of rim; it is greasy and worn, with the band in shreds; yet nobody knows the brains it was wont to cover, the kind head ever thinking for others, the aching toiler that kept together the home, and faced the wolf till it slunk adown the street, to some other house where the women and children were left, and no hat was hanging in the hall.

They have a strange burden there, clad with costly exercise of taste of a bygone fashion, star-like diamonds still upon the breast, and quiet courtliness Whitehall could not surpass. Some victim of a Monarch's jealousy, no doubt, floated hither from the Tower.

Leaning on the hard observant bridge that sees so much and tells so little, we mark a crowd of phantom faces, and dim-drawn forms, that start from out the depths. Charybdis! Scylla! Declare thy tenantry! Single out the shadows of this

clustered train. Come forth, ye woe-begone of men and women, whose lives were a triumph of creation, who now people the solemn halls all mud-bestrewn and refuse-charged! One has said, we can but stand and look upon the Sister Fates of the Parthenon with awe and in despair. It is thus we gaze upon the retinue of shades invoked of Thames. Seamstress, shattered framework of woman, whose every hope died out, stitched down to death, while sickness crept apace with time and wan despair. Broken-hearted wife, abandoned for the stranger whose hearth held more attraction. Sailor, the faithful grasp failing at last, and the void of a brown kind face upon the rigging. Delicate one, with the babe still nestling at the breast as on that fatal night. Sweet-featured girl, of the bruisèd trust. Priest, of the glittering ritual that turned thy shallow senses. Empress of players' courts, that in thy day hadst many thrones, but never a one like the horrid place we have thee from. Grey-headed speculator, of lost fortunes, that didst play dominoes with widows' hopes and orphans' lives. Banker, whom men said harsh things of, while every newspaper was stabbing at thy reputation. Head of a once colossal firm, strong as some pillar upon 'Change. Ballet-girl, clad in miserable print, that didst know the bitterness of the rising of a younger and a fairer favourite. Clerk, whose sorry weakness, despite thy fond mother's prayers, brought this about. Father and tiny girl, that walked foot-sore, a-hungered, and altogether weary, so many miles, to rest in this chill bed, with its curtains of November fogs, its quilt of noisome scum. Apprentice, indentured to a trade too rough and gross for thy wingëd strength, that wouldst rather die with thy dreams than see them ground away. Oh, grave and splendid boy, that hast clasped hands with Chatterton and borne thine ideals from this brown-green grave! Large-hearted, dusk-skinned beauty from the hot clime of the cactus-flower, how came this death to thee in the City of the Christians? Child, that wast known at corners with the orange-basket, whom busy men spared an instant to peer at, for thy fresh young face; how now? that little head has been pillowed on many a door-step, and at

end of it all to come to this grim terrace of the water-rat. Old woman, venerable, beautiful in thy frosted years, hadst no brave boy to save thee from the workhouse, that this was chosen? Tradesman, whose reputation being flown, the credit scoured the horizon like hawk in quest. Thus they pass on in rapid procession, the tenants of the chambers paven with bones that were lissom with grace; that corridor the waters sweep through, until it resembles the ivory waste where carrion swoop to find all bare. They pass on, are lost in the grey haze—perchance to whirl their ghastly waltz around the dome of cold St. Paul's.

Bring that hither! Take brush, clear water, and napkin, if you have one: a casket, silver surely, and richly chased, with massive banding; a lock, unlike our day, graven with odd signs—hearts, lions, arrows, and other allegory: it is much scratched and indented by rude cornering of bricks and tiles; it has been in uncongenial company, one can see; nails of broken tubs have irritated this fine fresco, handleless chisels have tried to pick a quarrel, tires of old wheels have encircled it till its argent paleness blushed plebeian, broad flails of loosened barrels have smote it in the face, horrible things have made their form upon its decorated plate, blue faces have stared at it vacantly floating on, dead dogs have rested upon it, and rats have sought to peer within; bottles have knocked it convivially and insulted the stateliness they were powerless to imitate; the sweep of boats has not disturbed it, and all the sluices have failed to wash it forward. It is casket still; and, if we mistake not, *that* the accomplished Surrey sent to the fair Geraldine by water, and lost about this part, or said to be; verses and gems the cargo. Our smiths will open it, we want some polished turnings of the muse just now.

If we could part the Red Sea again, dig deep where the host was strewn, remove the layers of drifted sand, or restore the trappings and the treasures of buried Egypt, we should not, even there, recover so many or so curious relics as on this night from the Thames; the river ancient as Pison, which compassed the land of gold; as Gihon, the palm-shadowed serpent of Ethiopia;

as Hiddekel, the ibis-haunted stream of Assyria; as Euphrates, the dusky splendour of borne lilies. Yet so strange the vast depôt we have unwatered, so manifold the sections of this basement, more stored than all the line of blocks upon the wharves, how contrary the old brown thing they handle with such comical contempt, an earthen vessel of rude potter's clay, yet hereout may have quaffed that lustrous Boadicea whom Suetonius Paulinus vanquished when the London of her day was laid in ashes: 'tis a great, unwieldy, long-necked, thick-lipped, large-mouthed vessel, stolid and coarse and heavy, yet hereout may have poured the wheaten wine which refreshed the gracious Queen of the Iceni. And not as of any consequence, but as one more instance of the incongruity of friendships and the kinship of one common clay, a marmalade jar from far Dundee has wedged itself impertinently within curve of the handle! Dissever that before removal to the cheery block surnamed Museum, where the ages count by platter, and each old pot spells an epoch.

They are lifting the slight lithe form of a lad, on whom many hopes once centred; the head-gear is divided by coloured quarterings, the apparel is close to the symmetry; the youth rode horses, by weight, for money; a superb sample of excess of training. Once the coquette Fortune played him false—it was a sorry turn; he disappeared; bought over, some thought; turned tail, others; crossed the Channel, a few; while a quartette whispered of foul play: and all were wrong. It was the night he came from Epsom, disgraced: an overcoat disguised the badge of his calling of which he had been so proud: walking the bridge with the listless, uncertain gait of a blank despair, feeling even the light from the lamps a pain, and the hasty glance of the passers-by a shame: disconsolate and more miserable every minute, and the result of all the superb excess of training coming out in the horror of a desperate deed, in the fleeing to the shifting, swaying, flickering sheet, that even as he looked upon took form and colour of the springy turf.

What is it now? A ploughshare! Rusty, yellowed, battered, blunted; where on earth did this run its course, whose

broad lands cleave to the furrows? We see the pleasant reach leaning to the water-courses, the homestead crowning the hill, the line of oaks bounding the pastures, the fair ridges of fallow land all bared for next season's splendour! And how comes the implement of husbandry wedged in this soft soil, this marl and clay and alluvium shrouding the secrets of this mighty channel?

The men are busy with their torches and lanterns; dark places are made light; washed-away boarding and masonry is brought into odd relief; hollows and grim archways, outlets and chasms in the stone, shadowy alcoves between the piles, loosened bricks with tortuous staples and titan rivets, slippery buttresses whereon red-eyed lizards crouch to view our inroad on their territory; all the long fortalice of unclean humid ruggedness, all the weird niches with their phosphorescent glamour, bared at last. Our band, like a detachment of spectral workmen, grope for aught the waters have lodged in the hidden chambers, and they start the evil denizens from their retreat; they turn out curious vestiges of river refuse, flotsam and jetsam of daily tides: corks, feathers, bits of wood, decayed vegetables, flowers, paper, muslin, old boots, bottles, straw, hops, children's boats, balls, dolls, old ladies' caps, bonnets, dead fish, a tangle of weed, pocket-handkerchiefs, straw-hats, parasols, walking-sticks, fishing-rods, oil-tubs, shreds of hop-pockets, a tattered Testament, biscuit-tins, a distiller's circular sticking to a "Guide to Knowledge;" bundles of mystery, egg-shells, orange-peel, masks, a clothes-prop, a glove, a cricket-bat, scent-bottles, pantaloons, an oar with the clutch of a skeleton hand still firm; a bib and tucker, a camera, a coop, the prospectus of a public company, a printed sermon, vases, a sweep's brush, electro-plate, various bulbs, a rabbit-skin, a portrait of Mr. Phelps, and an ancient Greek lexicon; jet, majolica, china, tobacco-pipes, a caul, and various other things, clammy, horrible to the touch, moist and chilly as hand-greeting of the dead; and, overrunning all, thick growth of excrescent fungosity that makes of the track a heath, a warren, a park, a valley, of prodigal luxuriance to the teeming people of this nether world. And one is curious to

know whither the passages and alleys here submerged used to lead, or where they may now conduct; here are ominous-looking cavities the sharpest boy of our party will not enter; sinuous channels of communication, dank, netted over, and choked, and we speculate upon their termination. Old Fleet is outdone by this great breadth of labyrinth with its secrets and mysteries and mosaic of crevices; these are constructed chambers, many of them, commodious enough for crouching of full hosts of fugitives: some open to the water, others are cage-like with fierce bars of two centuries' work; others, with iron sluice-gates, firm to the pressure of the stream as castle-doors; others have portcullis contrivances causing a shuddering thrill. A forbidding domain of caverns and kennels of the dead, and low den-like recesses where are a race unlike any order of creation; wonderful grottoes and water-sealed vaults, and halls of the embankment, and spacious aisles of cathedrals of old sewerage and dim subterranean catacombs of City rats; places to which the pleasant jingle of the bells along the Strand never comes, nor music of the boats riding above it all in the sunny summer days. Fishes swim gleefully past, avoiding these, living streams above bridge flow on unthinking of it all, and the mysteries of the Thames lie undisturbed; but this is over, henceforth it will be known, and the crowd will gaze upon the river with new interest!

A herd of Arabs is upon us. From alley to alley, long after closing of the theatres, it has been whispered that something is going on down by the bridge; they arrive in shoals, stand on heads, dive the soft deposit, grimace at the walls of water, vault with the lanterns like will-o-the-wisps, and chase the grey sachems of the rat tribe all the length of bricken and boarded ledge. Other waifs and strays are here, from wharves and docks and stairs and piers; amphibious ones to whom the river is a parent, and who resent this drying process with threats and curses. They think we would transport the bed away to some region of which they have heard only by tradition; some country where the hay grows that passes on the barges, the garden produce that goes rumbling past to the Borough Market, where a cabbage-plot is their realism of

earthly joy; and the poultry-yard, where guinea-pigs lave their mottled sides in an old brown and yellow baking-dish, is the only future desired, when all the mud-larks and scum-scraping are at an end.

Even as we watch these destitute ones, a stirring operation proceeds farther on. Hereabouts the collision happened eleven years since—a pleasure-steamer and a barge heavily freighted with grain; the stolid old hulk was comparatively uninjured, the lighter vessel went down, and many were plunged into mourning; the consternation is still fresh upon the memory. It is left free to explore now. Mud is thick on velvet of the cabin, on maple, and glass, and gilt; it is a scene of very wreckage, with the best of it broken and shivered to pieces, and the strongest twisted and rent. Decorations are chipped and rotted, electro of the saloon corroded, curtains and carpets nibbled and torn, chandeliers over-netted by weeds, and the whole dismantled deck a strange scene of ruin in a state of preservation. A man stands by the steward's locker, his apron green as the rest, his beard like Neptune's chatelaine, encrusted with innumerable shells. It is all a waste; the drip, drip of water, the toil and creak of wood too rotted to bear the strain of iron and rope, the splash as our men move over the eddies and gullies, the melancholy soughing of the wind—this is all the utterance. And they who went down, who changed colour in the homes to sombre deadness; the fresh-faced youth with his girl—they could not afford a trip to the sea, but having a day for pleasure, chose the rippling sunny Thames; the old man and his dame from the country town away there, Midland—who had not been on the river since the wedding-day when it was just such another, all smiles and invitation; the overworked forewoman from the outfitting warehouse, with but one holiday she could call her own, and that must be spent upon the river, it was so sparkling and welcoming; the butcher, sprucely attired with the best tie of crimson, vest of blue, coat of purple, trousers of check, horseshoe pin, and guard woven by maid of the tavern; the neat young person who taught the piano in small streets—that knowledge of notes was her sole wealth, and it brought in

little enough, yet out of it she contrived to save for this journey down the Thames, with its gleesome, healthful change; the schoolboys with their sisters, Londoners all, and accustomed to going in company, with laughter and love in their beautiful eyes, and thrilling with joy in the bloom of their youth. Hold the torch aloft! It might be a group of Buonarotti's or Cellini's, hand in hand, sculpt limb to limb. Phidias, Praxiteles, Lysippus, Pheidon, Chares, your subtle skill never posed, or chased, or carved, or chiselled white magnificence that equalled this—a mere dead group of English children, flushed to the last with hope, clinging hard to one another, while the curious, chill wave arose and benumbed the limbs, but not the lips that gave the good-bye kiss.

Yet further on are men bringing to the light of modern times an old sedan, entangled upon it a tiny glove, dropped may be from over the bridge; what little shell-pink hand was cased in this white silk, what powdered, patched old Countess rode in this quaint vehicle to the stately minuet in the nave of old St. Paul's?

The grappling hook has fastened upon the wire of a cage; a feather or two of rich-hued yellow all that remains of the sometime songster. But we see this picture linked with the rusted bars, and bent and broken home:—A pleasant villa, like a nest itself; a young wife left much alone, and we hear her whisper her sorrows to the pet, the only living thing that loves her, it seems, in the loneliness. The story has ended here for one of them; and the other? We see a delicate, poor lady upon her knees, leaning the throbbing brow upon the icy stone of the bridge, in her hand a cage covered round with paper, *this* is dropped, the horrid splash ringing in her ears through every street as she hurries to her broken home. They might take all else, but she could not bear that to fall into the stranger's hands. A situation on the morrow—for sake of the darling that prattled all night for the lost playmate, a music of anguish to the stricken woman entering upon the battle.

What is the burden lifted now with reverent care? Why do these artists gaze with so sad an interest upon this face

with its calm majesty? This was one of them. Let memory travel back and recall how one of daring genius was missed from his old studio at Brompton; how friends searched all his favourite haunts, even to the region of his grand noviciate in Italy; how the beautiful unknown of the passionate face and faultless form that had figured in so many of his pictures was sought also and unavailingly, and how men said the painter had gone mad over the ideal of some earlier story. How the house with the garden, the deep blue curtains, and the exquisite untidiness out doors and in, was kept, even as he had left it, by the mother who had fallen upon that mournful pain of taking possession, and who never lost faith in his return. Upon the wall fronting his work, a dusky face, and on the easel the last study—a curious piece of vivid imagery representing a long stretch of murky water, with a glimmer here and there from lamps upon the bank, and a train of spectral ones crouching by the brink; and, low down in the toils of river weed and wreckage drifted from northern seas, himself; but that grim picture's significant realism failed to touch her faith: it was left with all else, with the brilliant confusion of the artist's home: the volumes scarcely of the order approved by the gentle Christian mother; with the old Stradivarius she knew the tone of as well as the echo of her proud boy's voice;—the hookah, odorous yet, the Turkish compound but part consumed;—the embossed programmes of theatres and a dead bouquet;—colours fresh on the palette, and the silver and pearl knife stained with an opal pigment;—the brigand hat, the cloak thrown carelessly upon the velvet couch, all left as he had loved them in the chamber where he had spent all his soul, grown weird, traced mystic picturing, and vanished, even like the gloomy souls of fable. Replace the coat about the shattered, battered breast, the cap above the brain that will think and suffer no more; all the proof of skill has ended, the hand will no longer spell sweet things with colour; the eye that saw beauty so quickly is glazed to the fairer language; conception that wrought in tints and hues the loveliest of dreams shall weave no longer in the earthly studio.

They are shovelling lumps of some black deposit into baskets; coal or bog-oak of the forest that once stood here. One old savant in spectacles stoops over a vein of metal; they are not down here every night, and they agree with David in this at least, that there may be wonders in the deep.

Tin is here in abundance, the ancient tin that gave the island some reputation; and also tin of the moderns, all the old dutch-ovens and dust-pans of London, it would seem.

And now a quaint brass shield is brought to light; figures thereon tell of days when gentlemen allied with one or other of the Roses. Something is caught on the arm-rest, dripping like a shaggy dog, and reminds one of your little girl or ours, for it is a tiny jacket of astracan lined with silk, and sewn with lace, and of the best quality; fallen, let us hope, from the bridge, or over the side of some boat.

And here they have a tambourine, relic of some roving troupe of acrobats; and the heirloom of picturesque vagrants—Bohémiens, Zingari, Gitanos, Zigeuner, or whoever lost it; calling to memory the pleasant march, with the sultry sun full blaze upon the glossy tresses, the women tramping it as though possessed of the land, stately with tenderness as was Hagar; the young tripping before them garlanded with dog-roses, men chanting travel-legends of the tribes: brave, thoughtless, as back in those days when the *Volonté de Dieu* and the Red Cross ruled the land.

A green baize bag filled with school-books, the cord entangled upon the hook of one of the drags; this tells a tale that does not need the pencil sketch in the atlas; the big brick building, with its desolate rooms and dormitories more cheerless than the barracks; the red brick boundary of a garden the boys but seldom catch a glimpse of, and then only to see continuation of geometry. We can fancy something of the story, the coming of the gentle, tender-hearted boy, whose sensitiveness shames the vulgar coarseness of his new companions; the unspoken grief like a crown upon the youthful delicacy, yet with it all a manly bearing before the sneer and jest; the punishment for a fault committed by another, brutal torture from the hand of the fellow having care

of these, with iron discipline and but little love, adopting a system of treatment which resembles the crushing of wax flowers with a sledge-hammer; then laying-up of the child, and whispering along the grim corridor, and Vulcan-like ministering of the housekeeper; followed by the unavoidable sending for his friends, and the suavity of the brute; the kneeling of the father by the death-bed of his slain darling, from whom never a reproach had fallen; the taking away of his books with intention to treasure them, but memory of all causing them to take form of weapons of a barren deadliness, and—these were hurled to their fitting end.

The moon emerges from a cloud and silvers the grey stone and the great buildings stretching either side of the river; the distant masts and the net of rigging come clear to the view, more spires stand in relief than will be seen from any other site in the world; the throb of the City heard from afar tells of the town that never sleeps. From below the arches sounds a ringing of pick and axe as though the Titans were attacking the stronghold of Saturn! It is a study of contrasts.

They have come upon a halberd, stained and blunted; and, from contour of the blade, it bespeaks the period of the Huguenots; a merciless-looking axe of Genevese formation, a relic that has done sorry work in the crimson days. Tush! Take it yonder, and present it to the warder of the Tower —it may join its kindred.

By the smiles of satisfaction and the glistening in the moonbeams while weighed upon the fingers, we judge that gems have been discovered; some strings of lustrous stones thrown hither by a wretched, close pressed thief. Watches, and chains, and bracelets, and innumerable pendants, with a hundred gorgeous decorations. Place these aside, subject to the pleasure of Her Majesty, who, of course, will hear of these strange explorations. People are getting about; Humphrey's Warehouses and Fenning's Wharf—the block standing where the fire raged—and docks along the Tooley line, Barclay's area, the Billingsgate stages, the piers and stairs, the Custom

House pavement, and the Old Swan frontage are dotted with spectators, who wonder what the Corporation are up to now! Opinions are divided upon the why and wherefore of this odd commotion, some thinking the enemy are sailing up the Thames, and others that science or the *Telegraph* and *Herald* are looking for the source. One party will have it the sluices are disorderly, another connects it with the widening of London Bridge, and others, again, think it a malicious scheme to fire the river.

A sheen of light is on the dripping vegetation of the banks, upon piles and planks and girders, and the lanterns gleam on the sides, coloured like savannahs under fretting of the fire-flies, until they resemble a pageantry of some new mythology. But they are raising a form with infinite care, disclosing a face with its lifeless sculpture, so calm a wonder of cold beauty, that, insensibly we are won, and say, *this* would have been our friend; and we bare the head before the repose and serene tranquillity, quietly passionate as the silent poetry on some Roman cameo; one of those faces which speak an out-living music and a far-seeing hope, and that dwells upon the memory for ever.

It is a curious record of findings. They have an old tea-chest on the barrow, a memento of King William Street, no doubt, and weird are the fine arts from the celestial point of view. What cunning hand of Pekin, Nankin, Canton, Hang-Chow, or Tien-Tsin drew the loveliness hereon, or did it start from Hoxton, where 'tis said the tea-chests are abundant in creation? A menagerie of dragons and red-winged vicious plaintiffs in some suit with goblin mandarins, the barbarous show before a pig-tailed court of arabesques, grotesques, and moresques!

Something now of greater interest; a slip of once gorgeous tapestry, the reflex of work, a treasure of the Tuileries. Dainty fingers of the Duchesse de Berri may have wrought this silken idyl, whereon David seems to play before the King of Sicily, while young Italy or Israel (they are all dark alike, and the fishes have nibbled at the noses), standing in the terraced background all amongst the scarlet oleanders,

is entranced by the music, the song, or the harpist's golden hair. The colours have stood exposure well; take it to Sydenham, South Kensington, where you will.

What genius of buffoonery did these striped pairs of pantaloons belong to? What order of troubadours of the expressive minstrelsy, with excess of *allegretto scherzando?*

Heads are bent over a portemonnaie. It bears a titled name; the gold of the clasp is haughtily crested. Those of us who recall the tragic history of the fall of its youthful owner handle it with a species of awe, and we who knew and loved him in University days, when the glory of chestnut curls was fairer than aught on earth, and the frank face had no compeer, we beg for it; it will be to us as his voice, heard again after the long, sad silence. The Antoinette-like, splendid mother, who has dropped his name as an acquaintance, who long since forfeited the right of recollection, and who yet, we think, weeps scalding tears in privacy, may care to see this; she is more severely august than ever in public, scathing commiseration before it dares to intrude itself.

A small case comes next, and upon opening it we are surprised to see a chalice, a flagon, a shell, and stole and cassock. This may be sacrilege; or is some mystery of a changed life laid bare?

Here is an old canister that has stored ginger-bread for a generation, and at all the fairs and races. We can see the white cloth and its decked retinue; and what an ironical little gilt court it is upon the stand, and how warmly it caricatures Society; the glitter peels, and the greatness crumbles; the cool, methodical, sweet-toothed dealer in sarcasm seated on the tub, caring little for the world or its institutions, so the weather hold and the palate long for treacle, has had much experience in the ginger-bread way, and has seen many ups and downs, and roundabouts. She lives with the girl loosening those brandy-balls, in the hooped cart yonder; they know a deal of geography between them—more than we who have learnt of maps and charts: they manage the business, and so well, the girl may one day be set up in a shop with a front to it; they talk of that sometimes while the child is

cleaning down the bony steed. They have no friends, and want none; see the same sunburnt faces up hill and down dale all summer time; the same housewives, when in winter they change to the cart with brooms and rugs, and eccentric wicker-work; but a nod and a thank ye for service is all the interchange. They are liked, though: strong but silent sympathy exists amongst the rovers; many a cake is tossed to waif and stray on the caravan trail, and the cup of water is never refused; they are upon good terms with the merchants on travel, and exchange courtesies with the doll and rattle store next door, in case of paper running short. The slim, dusky child knows the trappings will some day come to her, the little close house on wheels, with pot and pan and tub, the coarse brown sugar and flour, with such else as may be in the locker when the old lady is called away above the gingerbread; and she preserves a dignity at once graceful and becoming, which is often necessary up there on the heath. We, with our exquisite essences and elegant niceties, think it a jest when told the girl is kept in tether closer than if she were at some fashionable boarding-school;—an excellent jest, no doubt! This old tin canister might improve upon it.

A quaint unwieldy horse-pistol has turned up, looking strangely massive beside the machine-wrought revolvers of Colonel Colt. Many a fray upon the highway has this made crimson, and it would be interesting to know by whose notorious hand. Did it figure or disfigure in the Rye House Plot, in the affair of Captain Porteous, or did it once belong to Smuggler Wilson, who, executed at Tyburn, came to life under the agreeable operation of dissection? Eugene Aram may have pocketed it with books and manuscript, or Earl Ferrers have herewith closed account with his just steward! Lord Gordon perhaps used it in the riot-days, or Hatfield fired at George III. Was it Parker's, the mutineer of the Nore, or did Bellingham, with this, assassinate the Prime Minister? Did Barnett wound Miss Kelly of Covent Garden Theatre by its means, or was it the pet plaything of Corder, Burke, or Greenacre? In the hands of Daniel Good or Bloomfield Rush this may have gained no enviable dis-

tinction; or Manning may have contrived to scare more old dames than ever did His Highness George, Prince Regent. The unsightly weapon is venerable enough to have served the entire calendar! As the men transport it to Newgate, they handle it with the awe entertained by the public for the classical.

Softly now. Replace the drabbled finery and smooth the dishevelled hair. We had a little sister and these twain were of a sex; be gentle with the tricky ornament—our little sister loved her beads, blue bows, and simple lace. How cold are the poor little feet, and the spun silk stockings all dirt and grime—our sister had her worked and warmed and perfumed slippers. This hat was a tasteful contrivance once, but the ostrich plume has long ceased to wear the beauty of a feather. Our little sister lamented if she was but caught in one shower of rain—and now fancy this washing up and down the dire canal that floateth to eternity, the strong buffeting of brutal eddies and fierce uniting of vagrant spars; conceive the long waste course where no harbour and no haven is, the chill desolateness of steering for ever and for ever, and still no progress; the terrific storms of winter beating upon the defenceless face, snows sinking to the bosom that sheltered roses, white hands outstretched for saving, for sympathy, but swept back by the hurried ploughing of boats freighted with girls! Oh, grim saturnalia of life! Realize the exposed beauty of limbs sliding by the clammy piers of the bridges, seeking to coil along the icy ledges of the bank. These are the fair proportions that curled and nestled upon down; and our little sister had sleepless nights even thus, thinking of such as compose the poetics and heroics of our little sisters. One can read this life through all its chapters; all the whirl and the waltz with sin, all the sickness of pleasure that vanished as a dream: a fair doll's face and the deep old-fashioned flax of the hair, drooping eyes, liquid and coy, and glittering like the lizard's in the dead of night when staid folks sleep, and the wonderful youth that never aged with all the waltzing; we see her everywhere, ever with fresh companions, always in silk attire: upon Brighton Pier, at Scarborough September

Races, on Durdham Downs, on the Tunbridge Pantiles, at Cowes Regatta, at October Meets by Leamington, and on Cheltenham's Promenade; at Devon's Porto Ferrajo, and upon the Duke's Drive, Buxton; on the Lees, Folkestone, at a Milsom Street Morning in Bath, an Archery Party at Aberystwith, the Races on L'Ancresse Common, Guernsey; or the Assembly Rooms, Ilfracombe. During an evening stroll on Southsea sward to military music; amid languor of the piney Bournemouth air; boating round Beachy Head with starlight upon Eastbourne; in the luxurious drives about St. Leonard's; Routs, Ball-Rooms, Drives, Promenades, or the sumptuous apartments of great hotels found in Bradshaw's appendix, and—*this*. Lay the head giddy so oft with care, cross the hands that trifled with playthings from cradledom with reverence, reject the opportunity for sneering comment, and murmur "peace" above the poor remains. Butterfly wings of dead turquoise used to rest resplendent upon these matted tresses where river weed is now the coiffure, and the tiny pockets where minnows are caught were the receptacles for gold without number and without limit, and yet—*this*.

All the time of our reverie the workmen have been hoisting bales and packages: not, as we think, from the merchantman sunk here, but part of the devastation of the terrible tide and gale of January, 1767, when the storage of cellars and basements, of vaults and warehouses, was all washed away. Tides of that day defied all the reasoning of the Keplers and Newtons.

They raise an old man of sharp and unpleasing countenance, they are abrupt in their movements as though not impressed by their charge; he is grey as a badger, with a fist doubled as in his last gasp he would have smote the river in its face; all his days he lived in dread—the dread of getting wet; important engagements were negatived if it happened to rain, at hotels he would strip off the sheets and sleep between blankets, he always superintended airing of his linen, and was unmarried lest the wife should be insufficiently particular. When the accident happened, the first and only time he ever trusted himself upon the water, it was looked upon as a retribution;

his leap from a gangway fell short of the length, and by the adjustment of natural order governing our prejudices he came to tussle with the element he had dreaded all his life through.

Oh, it was a weird phantasy, this conjuring up of the dead down by London Bridge, this recalling of the shades whom the waters had blotted out from the scroll of life! And often the Minister shuddered while the pageant passed; his mind echoing the poet's line—

And can the sea give up its dead?

it was this and not the chill contact with the grey old bridge that caused him quivering of the lip.

His vigil was well-nigh over, yet not until the dawn would the meed of fascination be fulfilled. He had often walked at these hours, by dense streams meandering through meadows where all the trees were hung with sable and all the land was dusk; the utter solitude, the solemn contrast with the scenes of daylight, magnificent with colour, tuneful with life's orchestra, possessed strange charm for him; and in sleeping Cities, where the current rippled sluggishly through low arches, and laved black walls of warehouse; and by silent mills, where ghostly soundings, the drip, drip, of clinging weed, or the creaking of slack timber, burdened the hush, and set the depth quivering; and by shadowy locks, that stemmed hard floods, and left narrow bridging ledges whereon to stand and trace some star, enmeshed in abysmal eddies; it all had curious charm for him.

But see, they lift with reverence a fragile form, some poor man's daughter. Playing upon the stone steps the girl fell in; a score of jackets were doffed in a trice, all the stubborn bravery of untutored Saxons stirred by one impulse; but it was the father took the mighty leap, beast-like, blind, conscious only of the peril of his darling, sublime, daring, maddened, panting in fierce extremity; his stricken gaze on the little face low in the morning sunlight, more beautiful than ever. And both were lost.

Long corridor of lifeless beauty is this bottom of the world's chief river. Fair limbs sway with the ebb and flow, faces up-

turn as watching those who often lean over, and look down, with so much of thought, so much of sadness, and thus the living and the dead confront through all the ages, while the former ever join the ranks of the vast company of the silent.

We have aroused a great commotion here, but the long light line eastward dispels much of the horror. Already the shadowy span of the arches is taking colour and form, those delights of the artist's eye; the spectral creations of our quest vanish, softly and silently as they appeared; one by one our helpers and associates leave the place for distant homes; majestically the waters roll to mingle in their first embrace below the dawn; the forest of shipping begins to tint, drab, brown, black, grey; here and there a scarlet cap of some boatman in relief from the blanched sails and trellis of rigging. There is noise above bridge, busy London is alert, and the country vehicles are rolling in; early workmen, and those who have been out all night, students of the City's most interesting phase, the first of the hours of the morning; these are straggling past, and they gaze upon the man still leaning by the stone recess with a measure of pity. White upon the sky is changing to pink, and the moist ledge strings tiny chains of rubies; a great spider has woven her web between the stonework, and she sits glowering upon her work in a rugged, but dry, corner, unable to comprehend the gathering of pendants of the river mist upon such slender work as hers. Fires are glimmering from one and another of the barges, smoke curls about the narrow shafts, men blue-jerkined, sturdy, sullen, with short pipes, appear on the coal-blackened decks; fish-freighted luggers toil in a body for the Billingsgate wharf; cabs roll past hastening to the Railway, luggage built high above, half sleepy families within, these look wonderingly and with sympathy upon him. Little ones wave hands with charming smiles, the delicate tints of the advancing sun-light flushing their flower-like faces—and what contrast to his grave and grey studies of the solemn hours. All the panorama of the river-side assumes clearness of picture. The Tower rises in relief from

the cradle of colour. London and St. Katherine's Docks, the Customs, St. Olave's Church, the Wharves, the South Eastern Terminus, and Rotherhithe Church, come forth on the clear perspective, the eye finally resting upon the imperial cupola of St. Paul's. Upon the bridge the people thicken; young men and maidens going to their work, or bound for the railways. It is the stream of Life and of Youth, and the Minister turns from the ancient study to the fresh contemplation of the dawn upon this, the symbol of time. Where Childhood is, with the charm of its wooing, Science and Learning and deadness of days fade away, with the ebb and the flow and the echo of dirge. Pæan of awakened life has chimed in the Dawn; he gives all his heart to beauty as it *lives*, beyond the Night, above the Thames, and in the Dawn!

Thoughtfully the Minister walked away from one of those strange night musings it was his fancy, now and then, to entertain. Homeward, where his household, but just stirring, looked without wonderment, ay, and with loving respect upon that tired wanderer; such early entrance was familiar to them, they knew that many a time and oft he passed the night beside the sick or troubled. He was so gentle with his servants, so courteous and tolerant, treating them with so supreme a measure of kind yet firm control, advantage was never taken in either of his houses—and there were three establishments to supervise; in his absence as in his presence duty was paramount, an almost unique experience, and one but too rare. Of a truth the members of his households experienced as devoted a regard, as legitimate an esteem, as did those people to whom he ministered, the majority of whom blessed his very name. And yet there were those abroad actually canvassing the man's morality, propriety, decorum, discreetness, virtue, and the rest; as though this monarch, crowned and diademed, should wear a white card with Moral — Proper — Decorous — Discreet — and Virtuous thereon, for every fool to stare at!

As it happened, he did not controvert any one of these inestimable qualities, and did live to the letter of their ethics,

and considerably beyond the letter; but he was the last man on earth to blazon this forth, and he would never stand up in a self-constituted court of gossips and declare he was this, or plead he was the other; although, feeling the faintest breath of aspersion upon his honour as only one of so fine a calibre does feel; and he would rather face the ruffianly foot-pad's blow upon the temples than the back-handed stab of the scandalist.

However, he did not permit this to influence any work in which he might be engaged,—he did the work, and thought about it afterwards; and if there happened to be an outline here or there that the vulgar might fill in with scarlet if so minded, well, he just left them to fill it in; and only thought with that sad tenderness of his how, that they might, perhaps, have been better engaged.

If Westley Garland had more regard for one Scriptural text than another, it was for "Touch not the unclean thing;" and immeasurably the most unclean thing in the world to him was scandal; so he left it to take care of itself, or to be cared for by those professing an interest therein.

Mr. Garland's housekeeper in town was a kindly woman, of dignified bearing, amicable and composed; with a placid smile about the mouth, and a soft clear light within the eyes; she was looking peacefully for the beyond whither had gone her darlings, husband and son, a boy mown down in the splendour of his flower-time; it had been a sore period with her, nigh to the portals of a bitterness more terrible even than despair, when she heard this man preach, and what a message! Thrilled, shaken, broken again, but by other weapons; moved, subdued utterly, and prostrate. This was the time of weakness, but it was better than that benumbed bitterness beyond despair. And again she went to hear him, bore up through passage of a mighty crowd, struggling as for dear life with those as eager to hear further of the message, and she heard; this time how comforting; it seemed to cover over, close up, heal gently, those wounds and bruises: weak still, but comforted, and comfort is strength. She went again, and it was the balance of the two discourses. Surely the man

must know that some such poor one was there present; she could not understand it, but what new life it implanted within her, what glorious hope! She was reanimate, was, if not happy, —that came later,—at least calm, and calmness is victory; she was at peace. And somehow he heard she was in trouble, as he heard daily of one or another; and she being of too fragile courage to come to him, he went to her, and was moved by sympathy, for she was a gentlewoman; and he thought of one placed much as her. He resolved to find her some home elsewhere; and needing one to undertake it, offered her the management of his house in town. This was the housekeeper; and when Westley Garland led the lonely boy to such kind reception, knowing how it would give joy to both, who can describe the hungry tenderness with which she first viewed his beauty, then gave him her mother-hand, while tears rushed to the eyes. But the Minister had gone ere that; his was the exquisite tact which calculates the moment to withdraw. Now understand this praise of Westley Garland is not with view to exalting him as some Admirable Crichton; he was simply full of imperfection, and he knew it; full of inequalities; not in the least an impossible order of being. Oh, far too human! But all the imperfection, and all the inequality, was counterbalanced by that charm of disposition, grace of manner, tenderness of feeling, sensitiveness of perception, Christian rule of life, and discretion of conduct we dwell on: take particular heed to the last, for it is just the point his friends are trying to make elastic, as though, this imperilled, all the rest would not tumble about his ears like a house of cards.

Thus all smiled upon this visit to the house of the Minister, and when Arthur returned to Dr. Nichols's, it was with far happier feelings, and with the thoughts of a new friend and of the kind woman who had so unhesitatingly taken the forlorn one to her heart. He said nothing of it all, but the doctor and Mrs. Nichols noticed it; little, indeed, escaped their notice; and the good doctor asked,—

"Have you altered your mind, my boy, about leaving us? Or do you still wish to do so?"

"I still wish to, sir; I shall feel sorry to leave you for all your kindness, but I am thinking of the future, and may as well be learning something of use hereafter."

"Yes, I think you are right!" said the doctor kindly. "I approve the courage prompting your reply."

And thus began and ended a new era in the life of our boy. First there had been the wild, unfettered, yet beautifully tutored period when the great Downs presented instruction of a book, and the stretch of garden was significant of knowledge as a schoolroom, but, alas! the loving teacher was gone! Then followed a short, dream-like time in the country-house, when his mind was busy weaving spells and shedding a halo about a young girl friend. Next the life in town, with its curious episodes and grave routine of work. Then the unknown —that to come, ever blended with the mystical and over-shadowed by a roseate hope.

Mark the wild white-rose trees in a garden, how one day they appear spiked all over with star-like buds wrapped in their green encasing: what promise of the coming glory, and what content one may experience, so perfect is the present beauty. But lo! another day or two, and they have opened to delicate small blossoms with maiden fragrance bursting from their hearts, and the palest of blushes struggling up from each as timid of encountering the stranger gaze: and such are more prized, but—the little buds are unforgotten. Another day or two and it is all a crowded mass of broad white bloom, there is a sea of crisp white leaves curling lovingly one towards another, there are whole winds of gentle perfume, slumbering kisses that nestle down between the white flower and the leaf, there is a crush of dazzling blossom, and an amazing glow of snowy luxury: it is all wondrously beautiful, and this is more prized than all, but—the little buds—so far away though now they seem—are still unforgotten. The day comes when all the bloom lies thick upon the ground, when the beauty is so lavish it is worthless; and until then the youth-time of the flower lives on.

An early life is the bud, an embodied aspiration, the trial of strength upon the wing which shall regulate the after-flight.

A first poem is ingenuous: the last responsible. In the first is the concentre of hope, the soul's loving invitation to immortality, the nucleus of faith: in the last it is a battle-piece in the arena of ability, skill, and learning.

Whatever might be before the boy, the past would be valuable, as a past always is, seeing that it builds and shapes and schools and disciplines and prepares for any after-culture; and if no culture, then for that greater life and higher thought than even culture brings.

His heart had been full of beautiful aspiration for long. The Minister just put these into regulation, and commenced the shaping of that which Browning says is alone worth study—a human soul.

CHAPTER V.

A DREAM IN MARBLE.

It was down in the "London Directory"—

GREVILLE LOVELACE, SCULPTOR.

It was a plain, unassuming-looking house, in a genteel square, West.

He was a shaggy, pale, stalwart man, of restless movement, with a splendid face, and the brow of an idealist and poet.

Artist and poet both, in colourless marble.

Every one knew him by sight; pronounced him eccentric, and stared, as is the custom of the country.

His windows were admired, nevertheless; his flowers and ferns, and lace, and bijou elegancies brought from Florence, were of a type of taste altogether unconventional. He had the credit of it all, for they knew there was no Mrs. Lovelace in the background; they thought that rather a pity, as he gave them the idea of a man who required taking care of. Within, he had a superb house, and people were satisfied that he lived the life of the dog in the manger.

Somewhere in the house it was known was an atelier, filled with such studies as duchesses raved about and schemed but generally failed to secure, for Greville Lovelace chiselled for love, not wealth, of which he had abundance; nor fame, which he rated at the price of cheap champagne.

Yes, eccentric, the gossips thought; of an isolated turn of mind; and as the spirit of dwelling apart is one of dead fashion, the tea-table verdict resolved itself "an undoubted genius, but peculiar!"

Society saw Mr. Lovelace in the season at two or three leading houses where one meets everybody; but he infinitely preferred not going out at all, while people calling to see him troubled him more than a little. Upon certain counts Mr. Lovelace was a lion, and everybody made a point of sending him the tiny perfumed compliment, although a refusal was invariably the result. Still, when the mood took him, Mr. Lovelace, sculptor, strolled through the rooms once, with a bow here, a gracious smile there, and the never-absent composure more becoming than a coronet.

He had written a volume of poems; rather good, somebody said; another body said there was nothing in it; the majority of people could not understand it; one coterie searched industriously for its political significance—he hated politics like the pest; an old maiden lady, whose one living hope it was to have her weird curls reproduced in stone, startled her intimate friends by pronouncing the book "A Revelation!" What with these and the critics; who, although he had never sent out a copy, reviewed the work, and politely declared the writer mad as poor Blake; Mr. Lovelace rather regretted having printed those choice, chaste thoughts. He recalled every copy from the bookshops; went out in an old brown coat, and bought up his own books with indefatigable perseverance; locked them all in a strong cupboard, and thenceforth avoided that track like a snake's nest.

He had spent twenty years upon that book; shaping, moulding, making it sculpturesque, until, when it became so ideal it even pleased *his* exquisite taste, he permitted the launch; and then to hear the chatter at the distance over the five minutes' reading, and the grotesque decision upon his idyls dead and unknown!

This man had been so long softening stone to pathos he was of finer marl, himself, heartwards: one of the sensitive sort, whom the brusque school would call a fool. He lived a double life—one of fine breeding, and true courtesy, as an English gentleman; the other, half music, half poetry; alone with his ideals in the cold and stately world of stone.

More enthusiastic men, with souls like boiling kettles, had

rushed off to Rome and Athens, while he was behind and alone in the dull square, the dim, shadow-wreathed studio, the quiet house where only the old housekeeper and the grave servants made cat-like echoes. He did not envy the enthusiasts, he did not care; cities were a bore to him, the travelling world a menagerie. In his younger days he had travelled, but seen little in anything save sham, had returned to his lifeless progeny more in love with their white limb rhythm, and passionless, exquisite faces, than ever.

People had plotted finely to obtain the *entrée* to his studio, but he was rather nice in this matter, and without being rude contrived to decline the honour of these little nose-poking explorations; so they turned to and called him "A Bear!" Other epithets also in plenty. Young ladies, sentimentally inclined, named him Phidias, and would have eaten the chips from the rich man's chisel. Elderly ladies called him Pygmalion, and twined their lithe angles caressingly as, thinking of the sweet conceit of their shapeliness in marble, they tumbled into bed. He was Zanoni, Manfred, Aram; and, when not at home to visitors, Lucifer!

His composure under all this—for somehow it all came back to him—was characteristic; sometimes a half contemptuous smile and low word to the fairest of his creations, that was all; and still keeping to the work, feature by feature and limb by limb, the dazzling studies crowding the little gallery, until it became difficult to pass without hurting the dignity of one or another of them.

In the atelier he was peculiar also. The walls were draped with the richest, blackest velvet, his figures reposed upon the same dense sable; folds of it formed the background to others; the floor was of black glazed tiles; such a veritable black and white world never was seen: the foil to the splendid purity of his family was perfect. He did all this innocently; artistically; with never a descent from the loftiest standard of purity, from snowdrop time to latest roses.

Where we should have been upon the fidget this insensible old Greek was stony as the rest. Always in the midst of the idealized human it was no more to him than to an anatomical

student in the weird Museum at Berlin. One day Greville Lovelace was taken by surprise; a new servant-girl admitted a gaunt matron with a tribe of as gaunt fledglings—they *should* have been taken to the drawing-room: two fainted, and the mother accused the man, in his own studio, of impropriety. That same girl *was* doomed to commit error of judgment; upon another occasion she admitted a bluff young farmer who mistook our friend for a stone-mason, and wanted a winged dairy-maid for Kensal Green. Another time Mr. Lovelace came upon this domestic genius dusting down the harem with a feather broom, and the delicate hand of a Titan.

Take it altogether, the gentleman sculptor did not love his race, and some members he cordially hated: it could not be helped, but so it was. What religion would one expect of a man who shut himself up like a toad in a rock?

His tenderness was wonderful nevertheless, and his charity exceeded the tenderness. The poor, the sick, the sorrowing, and those having no friend in all the wide waste of faces, these could testify to that we need not make public, since he desired the death of each good act the moment born.

All one night he had sat with the old mother of the man from whom he bought his stone, bought it dear, for there was a struggle to live in the small house by the marble-yard; they of the quarries monopolizing the trade. The man was away in the stone country when Lovelace called, and his mother taken ill since he went, the girl said: the old lady lay a-moaning for her son when the sculptor entered, and taking the hand, as cold but so different to those of his usual handling, he spoke soothingly and with more than the tenderness of sonship. He had, once, an old mother himself, before his fossil days.

Another time he saw an old man drop at a crossing, from hunger, fatigue, or something, quite one of the vulgar ailments; and the civilized crowd were kicking him aside pending removal by the police. With one of his great, serious strides, however, he was by, had the unfortunate man lifted to his carriage, and drove to a quiet, clean lodging, where he kept the old man until he was quite restored.

These acts were talked of, they lived their little day, and died under the great London sky, remembered least of all by him.

People next door thought Mr. Lovelace might have walked occasionally in the back garden. They would have ogled him from behind the dimity, and have stared as they stared on Sundays at the bear. But the anchorite never stirred out there, he knew each of the prim windows with its setting of pompons represented that useful but to him singularly objectionable article—the human eye.

People either side were not in the least curious, but would have just liked to know whether he locked his tea-caddy, where his washing was done, what were the antecedents of his housekeeper; was there a crest on the plate or simply initials, were his manners morose, did he keep a cat, had he ever been engaged, was he addicted to intemperance, and other highly important social items of which calendar is kept on all sides of us. The girls were set to do it over the broom-sticks, but making no progress went indoors, and painted him very black indeed.

And the subject of it all, adamant. Sublime in the dim and dreamy atelier, over a nostril that breathed fire below the snow, a mouth that wreathed like the innermost curve of the water lily.

And the solicitous—were not interested, but he really ought to marry; he would soon be cured of all that (the traits as retailed).

One day an advertisement appeared in the papers:—

> To Parents and Guardians.—A refined and well-educated youth of unexceptionable respectability can be received in the house of a gentleman sculptor as apprentice. No premium required. Apply personally at 27, Monmouth Road, Islington, between the hours of Eleven and One on Tuesday next.

The sculptor at times experienced a great yearning for something the eye could rest upon, when lifted from the wintry beauty of the atelier, something that should be warm and sunny, of equal beauty if that could be, but the beauty of living and loving youth; some other music than the endless majesty of the ring of steel on stone—a voice youthful and

sweet, attuned to the devotion of eye. Was this to be found he wondered? With his fine artist-sense, beauty only of the highest order, and grace to parallel that beauty, dare hope for welcome in the sacred precincts of that chamber. For gentleness he would have had a girl, made boy by garb, but this in London squares is delicate, and he hoped to find one as fair, thrice constant, among the flower-like of his sex.

When Mr. Lovelace arrived at Islington, where he had arranged to meet the applicants, an unexpected reception awaited him. It seemed, indeed, as though the parents and guardians of London had united to offer him ovation. The hospitality of the people of the house had been sorely taxed, and refined youth were stowed away with the dams in every niche but the coal-hole. Spite of which the review was of the plain school, mediocrity was upon the face of it. An ordinary man might have picked from this ordinary lot and returned thanks, but, fastidious to a point, the artist's whole soul rebelled at the outrage, the bare thought offended his æsthetics of beauty. He disliked a narrow brow in boyhood, and differed upon principle from socket-eyes; warm-coloured hair was an aversion, and freckles, pimples, and such small fry significant as a board with "No Trespassing;" as though he would find the lily purity of his own! He affected the courtesy of inspecting the population, and came off the ground with ghastly recollections. One had a cast in the eye, the second a twitch at the trousers, another a horrible boldness of look that would have played the dickens in the studio; if the nose was right it was red, and if the mouth was red it was cavernous! Here the hands were coarse and thick, there the ears overlapped upon elephant plan. A charming smile was broken to bits of its sunshine by irregular teeth; where there was beauty there was no refinement, and gentle manners were accompanied by ornament that would have failed of success at the Masque of Venice. He dismissed the lot, paid the expenses of such as had come long distances; and it was astonishing how many lived in the country; and departed, with the conviction that advertising was humbug. The assembly retreated like out-patients from a hospital.

Now comes the stone merchant with whom he dealt, upon the scene—with diffidence; he knew a gentle lad—the best boy of his Sunday school—in service as a doctor's page, but who would be glad to change the life; and above all for this, his father having been a sculptor, and the boy's thoughts having long turned in the direction of the art. He believed Mr. Lovelace would be very pleased, and he was sure the boy was apt and willing. Should he send to him, that it might be seen if anything could be done?

The sculptor had narrated his experience and his want, and the kind and grateful man had heard his patron's story without a smile; he felt for him in the majestic loneliness, and revolved a plan or two, but came back to his scholar with the fair young face and gentle manners; he fancied it possible he might suit, having been so liked wherever he had lived.

Mr. Lovelace heard it all, and willingly assented to see the lad. But at home he smiled the quiet smile; he had certainly been interested by the photograph the mason had shown him—liked the face very well; but then, thought he, the smile fading, boys change so, it is very likely after all there will be no resemblance. He took nothing upon hearsay, least of all from the prejudiced for or against; and not to do the child injustice, by forming any sort of expectation—more likely than not to be disappointed—he just forgot all about it; sunk all such modern trifling in the eternal, in the Greek, lost it in the flowing curves of the arabesques, merged it in reverie over his friend Gibson's "Cupid and Psyche," of which the *Art Journal* had said in 1849, "The divine, ardent boy—the tender, innocent girl, not yet translated to the Heaven she bought so dearly,"—and shortly afterwards turned from his tapping with tiny mallet and chisel, at sound of a little cough, to where there stood blushing at the threshold the original of the picture, cap in hand and hesitating; for the domestic, even yet untamed, had failed to announce the pretty-headed stranger. He stood there like a prince at bay in a fairy story, yet melting to capitulate; the sculptor enjoying the delicious confusion with all his mind on rack how to turn it to account.

Perhaps he had looked up rather indifferently, prepared for another of the young of the Huns, and this had come as a surprise, when his large, piercing eyes went swift from the white to the face like a flower, with the raven velvet for a frame and a foil: its fresh young beauty and blushes took him all by storm, and his artist soul gave in at once; he spoke kindly and gently as the boy came forward with that deference so engaging in the young, with quick perception taking to the man whom, albeit he thought him king-like, he was not so very much afraid of after all; and they were friends forthwith.

Then in spite of his nicety Greville Lovelace was not so hard to please! Nay, but this boy seemed all that the most exacting of idealists could have yearned for. We cannot account for the greater beauty of this than other boys, unless it was that the mother, herself a sculptor's wife and all her days gazing on the Greek, had imbibed so much of its beauty that this sequel was natural. Anyway there he was, and Lovelace quivered lest he had come to say he would not like a sculptor's life. Thus do we plague ourselves delightfully. He was carelessly brushing aside the chips and flakes, and dallying with the chisel, sole bit of lustre in the gruesome chamber.

"So, sir, you think you would like to be a sculptor? You will find it dull, dry work! And there are wine and spirit stores your father can apprentice you to, or picture shops with something ever pleasing to the eye, and the gaudy mercers with their silks and velvets and pretty girls tripping in and out. It is well to weigh these things, you will find it very dull and quiet here, and myself—I am no pleasant companion, cross and taciturn. You see, I am candid with you!"

He stooped to adjust a fold of velvet, craning his ears to catch the answer, and hearing nothing looked up stern and frowning. He was *en déshabillé,* and very bear-like that morning, with the shaggy hair dishevelled, and the coarse, grey working gown untied at the cord; all was out of fashion, and that forbidding frown was very chilling. The boy came up to the form of iron, side by side with the cold blocks, and laid a warm, small hand in his. The sculptor would not let it be seen but

he felt thrilled to the heart whilst he clasped the soft texture so confidingly entrusted to his keeping.

"I have come to stay, if you will have me!" the boy said, simply.

The sculptor led him into another room and placed milk and biscuits before his guest, with a perfect courtliness that might have amused the etiquette-mongers.

It was a tasteful chamber, bizarre and original, with all sorts of gem trifles, and cunning work in ivory and alabaster and bronze; with studies from or by the great Canova, and some of Flaxman's lovely work, and Westmacott's sublime Greek "Euphrosyne." Over the mantel, itself a work of wondrous art, forming a plain, spotless pageant of the glory of the Parthenon Metopes, was a portrait in oils of the matchless Dane, Thorwaldsen. Upon a tiny table of malachite one small bust surnamed the "Morning Star," a child in terra-cotta, one of Christian Rauch's sweet idyls: and two other children by Mrs. Thorneycroft upon marqueterie of fabulous value. No old paintings, or paintings of any sort for that matter, save the Dane's head above the mantel; no old china, no antique wood carving or old furniture, no illumination and excess of elaborate ornamental work; no bric-a-brac, or virtu, or exquisite Italian craftsmanship; Mr. Lovelace did not make these a hobby and dispensed their equivalent amongst his poor; but all else was so good, so chaste, and for the most part so classic, the absence of the stereotyped modern interior was unnoticed. Those bronze "Hours leading the Horses of the Sun" were of infinite beauty, and alone transfixed the eye, so much so that the well-worn carpet passed unnoticed, and the dingy suite of faded splendour (obtained long since to please the eye of a heartless Circe, the sole piece of his marble treasures to which had happened accident) was pardoned or politely looked over, as we cannot pardon or politely look over everything. Upon a slender tapering pedestal was a vase, graceful as a lily-cup, wrought by Cellini's delicate hand. Further, some crude but promising work of his own, done in boyhood when a student in the Via della Fontanella, and flushed with inspiration: he loved the work for old time's sake, the clouds were all so

rosy and so golden then; later his heart had been keeping rhythm with this colder land; the outcome of adherence to Art, maybe. Perhaps one would have felt relieved by a few Cupids and Nymphs, or even those Nereids and Tritons Rubens has disposed with the shells in his harbour; it is possible the owner himself had come to tire of the changeless repose and beautiful dignity meeting the eye at every turn throughout his house; certainly his eye this day rested with ill-disguised pleasure upon the curl-pated urchin nibbling at the biscuits, not fourteen years at most; and there were studies of fourteen centuries: he had been living so very much back in the periods. He watched the boy's admiring glance with interest, first at a magnificent copy of Ghiberti's bassi-relievi which adorns those gates of the Florentine Baptistry, of which Michael Angelo said they were worthy to be the gates of Paradise; from this to reproductions of Wichmann, the able German; to specimens of rare Etruria, and bronzes of Perugia; to one of Hiram Power's beauties in statuary porcelain, and a group by Theed; resting finally on Chantrey's "Sleeping Children," at which he stared hard over the milk tumbler.

Then back to the atelier; and under the fair, clear light where his eminence worked, the beauty came out in finer detail; and the sculptor looked about him with a vacant gaze, all the consummate art seemed wanting in something, seemed suddenly imperfect. It was *colour*, and *life*, and *soul*.

And while the man explained the nature of the craft and ideals in the stone, the boy walked round with reverent softness, and then asked permission to return to apprise the doctor of his fortune, promising to be back upon the morrow. And the place looked duller, colder, dimmer when the boy had gone. The sculptor could not banish from his memory the sweet young face: echo of the voice seemed still quivering in and out the round white limbs and square white blocks; he could not work; and Oh! impetuous, inconsistent, he must follow him. Not straight, but round about, to Doctor Nichols's, where he arrived first, for young sir had been loitering on the way.

And the deed was drawn that day, and the blushing boy was made a sculptor.

Mr. Lovelace did not set him sweeping up the chips or polishing his implements, but took him as something dearer: disciple, pupil, friend; of a truth he began thus late to learn the lesson of all living, that hearts *will* cling, that souls *will* make idols, other than of stone and ivory.

Of course the child loved him; all with whom he came in intimate contact did that, and far too truthful to conceal his gratitude, the motherless boy gave him such wealth of hourly affection, Greville was well-nigh beside himself. It was new and unexpected, and caught him in tender and sensitive chambers, making him captive both heart and soul.

The boy never presumed; never offended; was ever respectful, and invariably delicate.

So the face grew to be a charm in the room, and seemed to warm the stately troupe to sympathy.

At his work the sculptor would look up to where the beauty shone within the vista of his marble; his eye would wander to the black to rest, then back to the beauty again, while a proud, pleased, satisfied smile played to the thought of the prize he had caught. There was much quiet enjoyment derived of the one fact of its being so simply his own. No running about streets for wanton eyes of stranger girls to rob the treasure. Nobody ever taking the atelier in with the round of morning calls, or if so, the boy was sent to another chamber. A jealous guardian of his fair young charge he became indeed, and took right watchful care of this companion of his solitude. The boy had no desire to stray; liberty was his, had he cared to take it, but the servitude was a very joy, and the life a realized, fond hope.

That the education should not falter the guardian carried it forward, and developed every good talent by moral teaching. The classics, and the charms of history, became the pleasant converse at the work, and their leisure was devoted to the loftiest reading in the languages. It was a dangerous age, and peculiarly susceptible nature, but the mentor steered with admirable discretion, and all his pains bade fair to mould a

character of inestimable qualities. One trait alone was worthy of the super-tact bestowed—the whole-hearted undivided love it yielded. This was a never-ending charm; the love was a beautiful devotion.

The sculptor's life is the life of still passion. The art-shaping poetry of marble is one of rare sensitiveness—to beauty of form or of character. And these men think much, reflectively; with a deal of quiet, deep intensity. The embodied thought that has peopled our houses and temples, our grounds and cities, with a pale, chaste, lovely race that, unchangeable, seems to mock our imperfect humanity, has written a language of sensitiveness that earth will never willingly let die.

"Had Raphael handled the chisel," says Lamartine, "he might have created a Psyche of Canova." But as a fact it is not every man's property-model, this classic ideal of the soul. Greville Lovelace attempted a Psyche, and never artist went to the work with more devout ardour, but the block was barren, and the substitute would have served equally for one of Charles's beauties. He lived a life of homage to the Rhodian Art, while his apprehension of the poetry in the Antique was perfect, yet was he incompetent to render the spiritual head for over expression of the physical. This *had* annoyed him, the feeling now became merged in involuntaryism, the face of his boy stole forth in the grouping, and the youthful beauty became ideal in the atelier. Other men might crowd their galleries with those who, as Pope has written:—

> Heroes in animated marble frown,
> And legislators seem to think in stone—

but his desire was of an infinitely more tender type, and the sensitiveness to the love gave shape to the thought; his boy came out in the pure, colourless form around. Unknown to himself he got fashioning it when he thought to do a Cupid, or a Mercury, and the long mornings saw quite a succession of these unconscious copies, until a stranger coming in would have read the story of the sculptor's love fully illustrated by its ideal artist.

Now somewhere, in years gone by, Mr. Lovelace had seen a splendid Paul, from Bernardin de St. Pierre's romance; and he set him to carve of stone another Paul, that, it seemed, if only by reason of the model, should exceed in beauty the one remaining as vivid upon his memory as when beheld. So, the boy bared to the breast, beautiful curls all a tangle, loaded with flowers and ferns, and supposed to be lifting Virginia across the stream, became the next fine work in the studio; and this gave sublime promise; the great sculptor would eclipse himself!

But the thing came out a mistake. Soul, ideality, beauty, were upon the execution, yet the study was imperfect, it was more than lifeless, for that it lacked companionship. Then the sculptor bethought him. As beauteous a Virginia, as graceful, and what life might not the study achieve! But where was the girl whose comeliness would parallel this boy's, or make a mate for such a Paul?

Then he remembered a sister, worldly and wise, who had wedded a banker; not for love but the bank. A fair girl had come of it, turned at this time of twelve strong, healthy years. He did not believe in sisters, save in stone; and there had been little kinship; but once they had allowed his niece to do duty of courtesy, and stay awhile at the lonely man's large house. As he was not skilled in amusing little girls, the visit was a failure, and she went home declaring she would never go again; the white things had frightened her and made her dream of ghosts, and the grim, echoing corridors had caused her many a scare. Well, then, as she grew older, the sister, who like most wealth-wedded folk, was a bit of a prude, thought it better not; there was a something rude; something improper, about the idea of a house full of nude figures; not *quite* the school for a banker's daughter; besides, Greville was so peculiar! Thus it came about that he and his niece were almost strangers. But he wrote such a touching and uncle-like letter, and he must by this have put by so much, to say nothing of her being now a competent judge of good and of evil; so she was permitted to visit, with special injunctions on behaviour and *belles lettres*, and directions not to look at the statuary when any one was present.

The boy looked shy at first, did not half like this inroad, or approve the boisterous mirth amongst the quiet ones; but the uncle was very clever, and knew what he was about; he would submit to a little annoyance for sake of his art.

Yet how tenderly his gaze rested upon the boy's grave beauty, so much more pleasing to him.

The pose did not come off for some few days—he would not have it reported this was the motive of his invitation. Bankers are yet human—and meantime his models became better company. He saw the boy was not quite at ease, and pitied him, and was doubly kind; seeing which the girl would glide up and woo his dark eyes to smiles, looking hard to his soul with her strong, bright gaze.

In the second week the two were placed in tableau, arms and shoulders fair and bare as the company. The girl did not mind, for she wanted to see my lord without his jacket; but he blushed and trembled, to the chink of steel on stone.

The clever sculptor worked away delightedly, most innocent of the three, tossing his head back ever and anon to view the progress, and even thus sparing admiration for his boy, who it must be confessed had never looked more handsome, fretting uneasily as some lion-cub in leash. Lovelace, who was more Greek than Saxon in the atelier, may have recalled the youthful ministers to Jupiter in the Temple of Ægium, Archai, who were all receivers of prizes for their beauty; and these boy contests were some of the most interesting established by the beauty-loving Greek. The youthful priests of the Ismenian Apollo were likewise chosen for this possession. A grave record is extant (Paus. ix. 10, 22; vii. 24) of the wondrous loveliness of the boys who took part in the procession of Mercury at Tanagra. To such excess was this adoration of the human beautiful carried, the Thebans had a law which subjected artists to disgrace who represented objects less beautiful than they were in reality (Ælian, *Var.* iv. 4).

Thus grouped, the beautiful children presented a picture of rare poetry, and a tenderness of design in perfect harmony with the theme. Well might the pair have stood for that superb piece "The Birth of the Rose," taken from one of the few

"The boy caught the sculptor's absorbed glance, and his eyes drooped."—PAGE 95.

lyrics handed down to us from the Lesbian, in which, "The Rose," Sappho sings,—"Oh, Jupiter, if thou desirest to give a Queen to the flowers, a throne to Beauty, I recommend thee the Rose, daughter of thy first love!" The sculptor should have attained by this to matchless excellence over one at least of his models, seeing the exquisite repetition of that face. Yet the work seemed strangely difficult. He had selected a block of his purest stone, from the vineyard-crested quarry between Massa and Carrara, pure and dazzling, of the finest grain, as befitted this the exquisite crowning work of his studio: no veins, or blue-grey spots, or streaks of yellow, the common finding in the stone, but surely the crystal flower of that duchy in the west. Even the ancient Parian, warm, creamy, sensuous: or the grey-white majesty of block from Mount Pentelicus—alas! exhausted, but thus rendering the world's academy thrice valuable—was not more chaste. What was now wanting, when objects and material were not to be surpassed? The boy had to support Virginia, so long a time that he plucked up courage and glanced aslant upon his burden, and all in a flash a new light shone in his eyes and upon his face; it was instant, but it was lighting of fire upon the altar; the sculptor caught that glow, and with it the inspiration of his theme; and the boy caught the sculptor's absorbed glance, and his eyes drooped. The girl made a grimace at the boy, and asked her uncle for a sponge cake! It broke the rhapsody, and the sculptor ceased for the day.

But on the morrow it was repeated, and every day until the time allotted for her stay came to its end. Boy and girl were both dull that last day together; and the mighty artificer came upon some whispering behind the snowy statuary, but was so enraptured with his work he took no notice. He bade his niece adieu with courtly quietness, giving her a sovereign for sweets.

All day he worked away, scarcely missing the child; but then he had his boy, whose lovely face yet thrilled the room with warmth and light and colour. Still it struck him the tone and tint and hue was a trifle quieter; he placed it to the credit of the white ones, whose dead, calm glitter was of

course reflected upon his face. Next day at breakfast Mrs. Housekeeper came to him to say young Master had the headache; she had taken him tea, and he would come down-stairs after breakfast. Mr. Lovelace sat roasting his toes and reading something about the transit of planets, until, enter the boy, when the grave-faced looked up with a happy smile and gave him welcome, bidding him sit beside the fire; and, remarking the paleness, said the confinement was telling upon him, and he must get out more. They would have the carriage, and go to a morning performance at the theatre, anything to restore roses to that face. Midst of which came post-rap, and a letter from the niece, to say she had arrived home safely (he knew that, for one of his servants had accompanied her), and how much she had enjoyed the visit; a tiny flower dropping unseen by Uncle, who did not believe in nieces. And when he looked round to address his boy again the colour had returned, and he felt glad he had proposed that holiday, and just stepped up to take a peep at the troupe while the boy swooped to find the flower on the carpet.

They had the holiday, and on the day that followed returned to the atelier. He had set his heart on a piece he would call THE DREAM, and the boy would counterfeit slumber, the attitude one of rest. There would be no strain on his strength for that, and the sculptor planned in his soul a masterpiece of poem-like work. Day after day he wrought at it, and splendidly it grew beneath the inspiring touch; but, somehow, when he came to the face and brow, and down-closed eyes, and sweet-shaped temples, and all contour of the soul-part, he could not translate the life into slumber nor the slumber into life; his cunning was all at fault, his grand Hellenic craft a myth; he could not limit the boy's soul to the marble, for the soul was no longer there; it wandered with the girl who had flashed like a star, but had taken his young fresh love in her wake.

The sculptor tapped his chisel and wondered why the DREAM would not come forth. It was no more than block, despite the beauty and the youth. He spoke kindly to his model; he was to think pleasant things, of things he loved (thus said the sculptor, with a satisfied smile, thinking of self, you see).

But no answer came; he went to the couch and found—the model had long ago gone to sleep in right-down earnest. Whereat he nodded to himself reflectively; the child was so used to simulating the peaceful state, this sleeping unawares was little mystery.

But now Mr. Greville Lovelace started with a wail, and a moan that hunted it round the chamber—the wherefore, merely a name and a broken kiss of a dream; but he knew by that the reason why the soul-light fled his artist hand. His art had overreached itself.

With one strong, fierce blow he dashed the beautiful figure of Virginia to the ground, where it strewed the ebon tiles with cruel and dazzling fragments, but leaving Paul, beyond one scar, where the union had existed, as free, as fine, as firm as ever. The noise awakened the boy from his blissful dream, and he discovered the grand poet face distorted as by tempestuous fury, a very lightning in the eyes of late so gentle; and quailing a bit, he never moved, but saw the girl-friend broken to a thousand pieces; and then—that lion before the dismantled pedestal melting all on the sudden, falling upon his knees with clasped hands just below the marble Paul, while the passionate cry betrayed the bruised anguish of a life—"My God, not even this, but it is lost! Is there nothing human it is safe to love?"

"*Yes!*" murmured a little voice, and he looked swiftly up, to where beside him tearful beauty stood all eager to embrace him. Why, it was sweeter idyl than all his marble dreams, and looking from the chaste copy to the boy he took the hand half sadly.—"Our love of these, my dear, can never suffer, love them as we may!"

"But *they* cannot love back!" whispered the little one, very tenderly. Then seeing his friend looking strangely upon the broken fragments, "It is broken!"—and he drew the troubled face down and kissed it. The Sculptor understood.

* * * * *

After that, Mr. Lovelace attempted no more grouping. It was Sculpture still, but *alone*. It was Adonai, Son of the Star-beam: Mercury, nursling of Seasons: Hyacinth, the splendour of Flowers: Empedocles, the girl-boy ideal of old

transmigration: Endymion, whose beautiful sleep on Latmos won Diana from the chase: and other classic youth, as beautiful and famous; but it was always ALONE.

And the Sculptor found his joy herein. That white world with its exquisite realism was all-sufficient. He had in past times known the mighty longing for the vast which comes once in a way to such: for breadth sufficient for the soul, wide spaces and open tracks, great shining seas, illimitable plateaus and mountain summits piercing fleecy clouds, broad forests, far stretches of verdant prairie, shores and sloping downs, heaths and wide odorous commons, clouds and blue spans, space—space—space; the cry had been,—

"Room! Give me room! Give loneliness and air."

But not now; there was content at last. And it is astonishing the little room, small space, demanded by the soul when something is found to love. Verily it is contented with a nutshell with that love for kernel. So much for the finite, which abandons its vast yearnings, its soaring unto breadth, and uprising into azure, for little wall-girt bounds that seem for some idol of clay a complete paradise.

And the boy loved the life; so chaste and still, save for that ring of steel on stone; loved the white world into which he had glided as by spells woven of phantasy; learned of his friend the language of the grander day; grew splendidly pensive, and felt the poetry of which his soul was full, pervade his life with its calm seclusion; and he was happy as never before.

Sometimes he thought of a father whose young gifted life spent upon this thing had burnt itself out with feverish brilliancy in a foreign land; of his mother, of whom he had seen so little, and whom he would not now even know, but who was beautiful, too beautiful, and whose love of the theatre ruined his father's happiness. And more often than of these he thought of his grandfather, loved with a love passing the love of boyhood.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY FLORA.

One morning in November, Lady Ellerby, returning from her drive, called upon Lady Comdarlington. The Countess was at home, and sincerely pleased to see her friend.

After the compliments—"I understand, my love, you have been to hear our Minister; I am dying to know what you think of him?"

Lady Flora looked grave, a deeper colour dyeing the lovely face.

"I scarcely know how to put into words the opinion I have privately formed to myself. Frank, as you know, is enraptured—"

"Yes, but what do you think of him? Lord Ellerby is a great art-critic, a most adequate and accomplished judge of beauty, but when it comes to Ministers of the Gospel, I value your own opinion more highly—I know you to be ultra-fastidious!"

"Oh, I don't think so; before marriage my life was so very secluded, I positively had no opportunity of gratifying my fondness for attending the ministry of our best preachers. I have formed an opinion certainly," added the speaker modestly, "but it is of little moment—"

"Yes, dear—now do let me hear it?"

"Well, to confess, he realizes my conceptions of goodness—of culture—of refinement!"

"In other words you think him a darling!"

"Hush, dear! Not *quite* the term."

"Bless you, the Earl always hears me call him that, quite looks for it, I assure you."

"I have not got into the way of such familiar phrasing, nor do I think it pretty."

"Goodness, Flora! I hope you are not going to become a prude, and forswear words of affection. Ah! I understand, you preserve these for your husband!"

"The proper person, I should imagine." And Lady Flora's exquisitely pure face was lighted up with enthusiasm kindled by her love.

"Yes; I do so admire your sentiments, they are new to me; I don't know whether old-fashioned, or new-fashioned, they are certainly new to me. But I am glad you called, I was wanting to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes, I want you to tell me about this *protégée* of Lord Ellerby's; who is she?"

Lady Flora looked rather bewildered. "I don't know what you mean, dear!"

"No, I suspected it, then I ought not to tell you! If I were torn to pieces by wild horses, not a whisper should escape me likely to mar the happiness of a newly-married pair like your pet of a self and your darling of a husband; as I said to Lady Pepper, 'these things are best found out alone.'"

With startled look the young wife rose from her chair, and crossing to the Countess, sat down beside her upon the couch.

"What is this, dear? Tell me, what do you mean?"

"Well, the Hon. Mrs. Glover and Miss Glover—let me see, do you know them? No, I think Fanny said she did not know you; any way, they live at Kensington, you are aware, my dear? Driving the other morning, whom should they pass, but—no, not for wild horses!"

With which tantalizing expletive Lady Comdarlington set those rows of pearl close, and looked elegantly immobile. Whole worlds should not force her to utter another word.

To Lady Flora it was more mysterious than terrifying thus far; she was so utterly taken by surprise that this was the

predominant feeling; but not after parting of the rows of pearl. Unsolicited, her ladyship the Countess, apparently thinking better of her resolution, exclaimed, with genuine sympathy,—

"I ought not to keep it back, and I won't; nothing shall induce me to conceal this any longer; besides you may be able to throw some light upon it. Don't think, my dear child, we take the slightest interest in it beyond regard for your own happiness, not the slightest, but we *do* feel for you; there—you know what the men are!"

"No, I don't!" said Lady Flora simply.

"Well, so much the better; but you will do! As to trying to keep a handsome fellow in like your darling of a husband, it can't be done. Lived in Paris too! Spoil any man!"

"But what is it, dear?" asked her ladyship, becoming seriously alarmed.

"Nothing, my dear child, I do assure you nothing! They are all alike, you are no worse off than I was, and we make up for it by adoring some darling of a fellow like this Garland, all tenderness, all sympathy. When one's husband takes to driving pretty models about the town it is high time to look for sympathy; at least I think so, and you know I am not one of what you may call the advanced school!"

Gradually something wonderfully horrible was dawning upon the young wife's mind. Lady Comdarlington's motives were harmless in the extreme, she was but faithful to her instincts. But this rendered the communication none the less hurtful to her innocent friend. She turned with infinite astonishment and pain to the Countess for an explanation.

"Well, I had it of Miss Glover; you know; quite an exceptional thing for dear Fanny to see or know anything! But it is as Lady Pepper said to me this very day, 'It is not for well-wishers to make mischief!' Ah! it's a wicked world, a delightfully wicked world, my love, but what are we to do? One can't get out of it, that's certain, and yet to remain in it is fraught with so much peril; the men *are* so naughty, but your darling of a husband is a regular rogue. So sly of him! And you really didn't know of it? But of course you did not, you are so unsuspecting, and yet I almost wonder how

it is you never objected to his being so much away from you."

Flora felt as though a good cry would be a relief, but she was not going to give way if she could help it, for this charming Countess to entertain her friends withal.

"Frank has been away some few days, but I know he has a studio near town, and when taken with one of his painting fits he retires thither, he tells me, until it is over; you will admit to good purpose." And the devoted young wife even at that moment thought proudly of his lordship's paintings.

"This sort of retirement gives men too easy facility for the indulgence of their hobbies! Comdarlington wanted to retire in the same way—only not the same plea; billiards or something in that line; but no, thank you! I kept close in Comdarlington's shadow, and the consequence is the Earl has been wonderfully good. It was I who trained him to love his church, and now look at him! When do we miss? Why, my child, we even go upon Christmas-day!"

Flora bowed her head before this august admission, feeling sadly without the pale: sometimes she had not been on Sundays.

"But your ladyship has not yet told me what all this is about."

"Coming to the point immediately, dear, is so essentially a business qualification I do not study its principles, besides it's brutal and low; but I will be candid, I will indeed, and, if I pain your feelings, don't blame me, blame my candour. You must know that Lord Ellerby drives out with a most lovely creature, quite young, younger than yourself; pays this young and lovely creature marked attentions; is keeping this young and lovely creature at his studio: now *is* it correct? That's retirement from the world! Of a truth I don't know when they are naughtiest, in the world or out of it! Take my word for it, Flora, the sole confidence is the Church."

Yes, she was even then thinking of that man with the wondrous pity, him whose every word vibrated with his intensity of feeling. She did not know whom to turn to in this hour of trial, she only knew people of the Comdarlington

order, and their complimentary commiseration but pained the deeper. She was sitting so forlorn and so unlike her usual self the Countess kindly took the small hand in hers, saying,—

"Do not let this trouble you, it will all come right, I dare say. These artist-gentlemen, you know, do take a fancy now and then to some striking face which looks well upon their canvas; but, bless me, if it was a serious matter, what imbroglios it would entangle them in!"

"I am much obliged for all your ladyship has told me; possibly it is as you say; but I am sure my husband will tell me all when he returns: till then I have faith in him!"

"Dear child!" murmured the Countess, supremely affected, adding,—

"Of course you will not mention my name, nor dear Lady Pepper's, nor Miss Glover's. Fanny is so sensitive to the least approach to a scandal!"

"All you have so kindly told me is in strict confidence."

"Thanks, sweet, I knew you would; and now promise me the pleasure of your company to tea to-morrow, a really quiet, five o'clock tea, one friend to meet you, no ceremony, just a little enjoyable chat; *will* you? I shall think it so kind! Now *do*, dear!"

And her friend promised, although feeling far from in the humour, but it was not Lady Flora's nature to refuse anything that would give pleasure to another.

It was a comfort to arrive home, to retire to her chamber, to kneel beside her bed with the beautiful face buried in her hands, with tears making them moist, and sobs echoing through the solitary chamber.

And all the strangely romantic and unusual nature of her courtship flashed upon her in that moment. A mere beauty quest! And might not this lover of beauty, whenever and wherever found, pursue a similar quest again, should his fancy be taken as it had been in her own case? She shuddered.

Their acquaintance had been of but brief duration before marriage, for Ellerby was not the man to wait for anything, least of all for a wife: but their love had been sincere, and Flora tried to think her husband true.

Whom to turn to in this emergency she knew not, yet felt she would give much for a friendly word of advice or comfort. Of all the select circle of their visiting acquaintance, she did not know one whom she could open her heart to upon a subject so delicate. They were admirable while it was confined to dress and fashion, jewellery and flowers; but oh, not for this!

Lord Ellerby had been so proud of his pretty wife he had introduced her rather freely, and her ladyship knew more very nice people than do the generality of young wives; but these very nice people were valued at their proper worth by Flora's calm sense. But *one*, genuine, staunch, true, would have been more valuable than all of them together.

Lady Flora had a suspicion that she was invited to meet Miss Glover, and she could scarcely contain herself, so anxious was she to ask that lady in person for particulars which her friend, the Countess, could not or would not give. Not to become a spy upon her husband, Flora would have scorned the thought, but to ascertain the address of Lord Ellerby's studio, which she did not even know. But his lordship's day-or-so's absence had extended over a week, and she had received but one letter, telling her he was in the thick of a splendid study, which he should bring home with him for her acceptance. And she had been perfectly content, until this disturbing event occurred, and Lady Flora rested content no longer.

Her ladyship's carriage drove up to the Countess Comdarlington's slightly before time by etiquette, and her ladyship was shown to the drawing-room, but had scarcely crossed the threshold when she started and fell back a step terribly confused, for there rose to meet her with courteous ease the other guest—Westley Garland. Lady Flora knew this to be a heinous, if playful intrigue upon the part of the lady of darlings, and, with hand on door, she murmured her half-apology,—

"I beg your pardon—I thought—the Countess—"

"Has but this instant left the room to search for a book of photographs. Permit me to summon the maid to take your bonnet?"

He touched a silver gong while saying this, and, with thoughtful regard for her confusion, placed a chair for her, and immediately returning to his own, was apparently absorbed by the book over which he was bending. And Lady Flora thought him excessively kind, or excessively careless; she inclined to the former. His voice thrilled, it was so unlike the wide chorus of complimentary, flattering, insincere ones to which she had lately been accustomed. But he took so little notice of her presence there she quickly regained composure, and even stole a half-timid glance at the cause of her embarrassment. She could observe him better thus leaning over the volume, than when in the pulpit. All faces thus bowed in attitude of study possess a charm unlike that worn at any other time, when intellectuality becomes sculpturesque, austere with the soul-majesty men trace in stone. Yet it was no hard face, no rigid and unfeeling expression, loveless and cold; rather full of a melancholy more striking than any of the emotional aspects, and so manifestly tender and compassionate, Flora felt attracted by it, and drawn towards it as never by a face before. Still she thought it singular he neither looked up nor spoke. Stay,—"The maid seems a long time; could not have heard, surely!" and he again touched the bell upon a side-table near by.

Lady Ellerby thought this Minister singularly cool. Further speculation was ended by appearance of the Countess's tire-woman, who asked if it was her ladyship's pleasure to accompany her to the boudoir of the Countess. Mr. Garland at once held open the door with affable politeness for Lady Flora to pass out, and, while doing so, in thanking him, her eyes met his, and they were strangers no more.

Not a word was said, but she knew this man to be her friend, to be the friend for whom she had prayed in her trouble: genuine, staunch, true.

In the boudoir the Countess, charmingly effusive, having kissed her friend, took the hands captive, looking deep in the quailing, hazel eyes.

"Am I forgiven? I did so want you to know him! You'll be very pleased with him upon better acquaintance."

"Possibly, but I felt dreadfully confused, it was too bad!"

Her friend laughed merrily, and, tapping a book of photographs in her hand, said,—

"Blame this, please don't blame me, I can't bear it, really! But take your bonnet off. What a duck it is! So glad the Minister saw you in this! And he will have to escort you home, you know, dear. Don't be nonsensical about it, he is walking, poor man! And he so soon takes cold; it is some distance, and only yourself in that elegant carriage; you are not inhuman, you were never unkind, you won't resist my plea?"

And Flora, as usual, assented, for the comfort of others, and at the expense of her inclinations.

After that they returned in company to the drawing-room. Still bent over the book, he might not have moved, he seemed collected as though in his own study; but upon entrance of the ladies he gravely closed the work, with evident interest in its theme.

"I am sorry," apologized the Countess, "to have left you for so long; but there, you know what the ladies are! My friend, Lady Ellerby, whom you have seen before; Flora, Mr. Garland. Lady Ellerby and I are widowed for a while, thus your graceful acceptance of my informal invitation is thrice welcome."

"The Earl is away from Brighton?" bowing slightly in acknowledgment of her compliment.

"In Ireland! And dear Lord Ellerby is,—we don't know where!"

Then the sad eyes read pain upon the fair face before him.

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE ELLA REMEMBERS A NAME.

WHAT was to some extent a blow, and altogether a severe annoyance, had befallen George Percival.

After the mortification of describing in brief to those in Queen Street all that had transpired, he had fled from the shocked looks, more galling than words, because one cannot argue with them, and had done as many another has done in trouble; gone home to the one face that never looks shocked, be innocence or guilt the portion, and told a listening mother everything. But she had something to tell which would grieve him more than he had grieved her, for she *knew* her son *could not* do as he had been charged; she was comfortable on that score, and merely said, with tranquil folding of the hands,—

"If it is God's will that you should enjoy a little less prosperity, my dear, depend on't some wise prevision underlies it, something is in store which shall make up for all. And who knows," added the good farmer's wife half to herself, "but that this strange affair may have been, after all, ruled for some purpose we cannot now foresee?"

The strange affair was made comprehensible to George's horrified understanding in this wise:—Little Ella had been walking in the road beyond the farm, had been seen by Mrs. Percival to quit the garden, and had been seen upon the roadway by one of their labourers, and—been seen no more. In her alarm Mrs. Percival sent some distance for the farmer, and he, on riding up, although it was dinner-time, never dismounted, but scoured the roads for miles. And one he ques-

tioned had seen a tall, queer-looking man walking fast along the meadows—the path leading to the railway-station; thither across country the farmer scampered, and in an hour came up with a tiny platform bare alike of passengers and officials. After shouting lustily for a quarter of an hour, some one heard him, and with drowsy leisure slouched to know the cause of the disturbance. Farmer Percival quickly made this known, and was rewarded by the drowsy one declaring he "knew nought about it, and didn't want." Anon a porter appeared upon the scene, and with information; he had seen a man and a girl, he remembered, yes, distinctly, because it was the last train that had gone, and these two were the only passengers; he quite remembered; they were booked for London! And here it ended. It had happened only that morning, and a nice way they were in, as well they might be!

And George heard, with a terrible numbness at the heart; it all seemed to have come at once, trial upon trial, as they have from Job's time until now, such things being too evil and too cowardly to go in single company. He had so looked forward to a season, if but a brief one, with the little girl; it was to have cheered him for the future, made up to him by gentleness for the rough experience of the trial; and now, *gone!* George felt benumbed, indeed, beneath it, but not for long, bestirring himself if for her mother's sake alone; and after quiet meal-time with his beloved parents he, as much at their wish as by his own, returned to town, and gave the police a description of the child (and her companion, so far as was possible); and then went on to Queen Street as of old, much to Gabrielle's quiet joy, for she had been greatly wounded by the events of the morning, and thought the clouds were gathering very thickly about her. But she pitied George most of all, to think that he, so unoffending and so courteous, should have enemies, and be the victim of a cruel conspiracy, for this it was, Gabrielle felt well convinced; and it was matter of as great surprise as sorrow. But Gabrielle took firm ground in the matter, and that, the strengthening of her cousin; she knew he needed something more than passive sympathy, even active comforting, and Gabrielle laid aside all

self entirely, and made the child the means of distracting thought from present trouble; but when he returned at even-tide and told her she too was lost, she was discomposed and full of yet deeper, yet more unselfish sympathy. If she could have gone out that moment and laid a hand upon the child, and brought her in to George, she would have done so, even though her heart broke over the operation; but it would not have been the case, she was too practical for that.

How much she felt to love him, now in the hour of his trouble! She could not help it; but would, had she dared, have wound her arms about his neck and taken of him the full burden of his care. Gabrielle did not do this; but she did stand beside him, a hand upon his chair, looking down upon the clear broad brow so pityingly, it seemed the eyes below there must be drawn upward by that magnetic power, that sublime emotion which moved a fragile woman to the strength of heroines.

"Do not be down-cast, George, all will be well: you did not need the Bank, you can live without that; and remember it is but a day or two ago you talked of doing so!"

"Ay, we often talk of things which, when they come and front us face to face, crush us most utterly. I do not fear the living; when I complete the work I am engaged upon, it is a living in itself, providing always the publishers will take it. I think, Gabrielle, most of this disgrace. God knows I am not proud, but I do like to hold my head erect; and how can I do this beneath the stain?"

"Few know of it, and for that few, what matter?"

"It will spread like poison upon a stream, as these things do."

"But you will be cleared, and then the world will learn the cruel injustice done you."

"People never care to listen to that which clears, or to remember it. Have you not found it is the matter which is injurious they take most pains to ascertain, and to remember? But I would have left this and escaped to some humble sphere, contented could I have sometimes seen poor little Ella! That is my great grief."

"My dear cousin, do you seriously take into consideration that there are other little girls besides Ella in the world?"

"It does not compensate me for loss of her."

"No, but it points an obvious possibility of discovering another. Events may be transpiring to place another in your hands, requiring even more care and protection than Ella. You will come and see us very often, George, if you are determined to leave the kind ones here?"

"I could not bear to face the prying gentility at every window whenever I set foot in Queen Street; for the other part of your remark, I do not think it likely."

"Well, George, you know I look at things in a very plain way, yet with a faith that is sometimes equal to much reasoning; and I hold to the opinion that dear little Ella would not have been removed from your care without some good cause. Perhaps it was foreseen you would become too fond of her—I always had an idea that when you did take to anything it would be no insignificant attachment—and in that case to be compelled to part with her when Mrs. Travers had again a home would have been painful to you, I am sure. Now I think it very likely you will be thrown somehow in the way of another requiring a protector and guardian more than does this little girl, who, at least, has her mother to depend upon. I think you called me once your good prophet, did you not? Well, let me be your prophet now."

He revived under the influence of her words and cheering manner: he did not notice—it was so faint he could not—the veriest shade of sadness at her allusion to the words he had used of old time.

He took his cousin's hand in his, and gravely thanked her.

And then they talked anxiously of the whereabouts of the child, and of the possible cause of her disappearance.

"I incline to an opinion Mr. Beresford Travers is at the bottom of this—and yet Mrs. Travers never went out all the time she was with us, when likely to be seen; and, even if he saw the little girl, he would not know it was his grandchild; besides, I believe he was in town at the time, or certainly absent from the Court."

"Is it not more likely to be that enemy of whom you have told me Mrs. Travers appeared in constant fear?"

"If it was known the child had been entrusted to my keeping, it is more than probable."

"There is some horrible web."

"From which I am about to release myself by retiring to complete obscurity. I found a highly respectable and apparently a comfortable home this afternoon, in a quiet street which lies at the back of the Euston Road; there I propose to devote all my time to my work; I shall have nothing to deter me, and should make progress."

Gabrielle heard with a heavy heart, and felt that, indeed, the dream was over.

* * * * * * *

What had really happened to Ella may be briefly told.

Walking by the hedge-side, she came to a gate, beside which was a stile, where the footpath across some meadows led to the town; sitting upon the stile was a man, Bartholomew Rolf.

He spoke to her kindly enough: she answered him, and walked on.

Presently she found he was following her, and she began to retrace her way, meeting him a hundred yards back on the road.

The man looked hard at the child, and exclaimed, "Why, Miss Travers, surely I am not mistaken, I think!" drawing a letter from a greasy pocket, and looking down on the superscription.

"Yes!" said Ella, eagerly, losing caution under the apprehension of the messenger coming from her mother who might be ill.

Then he handed the crumpled missive to the child. "You are to read it now, please!" She did so. This was the purport:—

Dear Little Girl,—You will accompany the kind bearer of this, who will bring you to town at once; do not stop for anything. George Percival.

She had seen the signature many times before; she put the letter in her pocket.

"I must run and tell them I am going, and get my things together!"

"No," said the man, "you will come with me, my dear; we shall barely catch the train as it is; there is not a moment to spare!"

"But will you please to tell me what for—why am I wanted so quickly?" She could only think of her mother.

"Something very important; I am only obeying orders; my instructions were to see you to town, and if you'll come I'll do so; if not, I'll go on!" and he made as though moving off.

She said it was such a little way back to the farm she would just run in and tell them. The man said he would lose the train, and kept on the walk across the field. In an agony of perplexity she entreated he would but wait a minute or two. The man said it was more than his head was worth! It was a long, thin, hard, cruel head, and it *was* more than his head was worth.

With tears she implored of him to wait, and he called back she could write all she had to say, but that if she didn't come along he couldn't wait. So she went with him, racked with pain for her mother's sake.

Upon arrival in London he bade her keep close to him or she would be lost, and the ill-assorted couple walked quickly in the direction of Gray's Inn Road. At a dead-and-alive sort of tenement in this thoroughfare the guide paused, lustily ringing a bell. The summons was answered by a slatternly serving-maid, the pitiable fag of the establishment of three sets of lodgers and the numerous progeny of those in occupation.

Bartholomew Rolf walked into a down-stairs front room, where, upon an apology for a sofa, was reclining that particular blonde who at times caused such commotion in Queen Street, Paddington.

"How do, my dear?" said Mr. Rolf, with particularly indifferent affection, considering the lady passed as Mrs. Rolf;

"this is the little gal I told you of, and you will take especial care of her."

The 'little gal' was looking with wonderment at that astonishing construction, the plaited coil upon the lady's head, and she just turned to the child with, "Well, what are you staring at? Come here, child, and let's look at you!"

The child went over to her, well scared by the grim welcome, and wondering where Mr. Percival was all the time.

"I don't think much of you!" And the blonde turned pettishly to Mr. Rolf, who was occupying himself with drawing the cork of a bottle of ale.

"I expected you home last night, Bartholomew!"

"Couldn't get away, never caught a sight of her till this morning!"

Ella was becoming frightened. She looked very timorous and pretty to any eyes but those of this ferocious pair, of whom the woman, tawny as a tigress and as savage, was the most intimidating.

"May I see Mr. Percival, if you please?" civilly asked the little girl, but quite with the manner of having the right to ask to see that gentleman.

"Yes, you dare get asking to see gentlemen in my presence! There's no Mr. Percival here! The first gentleman you'll have the pleasure of seeing is Mr. Noel Barnard, I suspect."

The child turned white. That was the cruel enemy, and this a trap she had fallen into but too easily. The peril was imminent, but her presence of mind was equal to the emergency; she had not passed through the severe tuition for nothing. She quietly removed her hat and jacket. Mr. Rolf poured her out half a glass of foaming ale,—this she declined.

"I think I can drink a bottle, Bartholomew!" said the fair one upon the sofa, and Mr. Rolf drew the cork of another bottle. After which that gentleman went out, strictly enjoining Mrs. Rolf to take particular care of the child. But Mrs. Rolf went off to sleep under the effects of the novel she tossed to the child to read to her. Then Ella remembered the name of *Sir Horace Vivian, Belgrave Square;* thought also of a scheme of escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

A QUIET CUP OF TEA.

If November can be pleasant anywhere—and, after all, there are balmy and genial days in the much-abused month—it is in Devonshire, and pre-eminently at Torquay, where nature seems to cling longer than elsewhere to the exquisite hues and softened air of autumn. "*Quel beau pays!*" cried the great Napoleon, when, a prisoner, he gazed over the panorama of Tor Bay; "*Comme il resemble La Porto Ferrajo!*" Of a truth the country about the charming town is as luxuriant through the winter as are many other parts of England throughout the more favoured months.

Eagle Hall looked particularly comfortable and pleasant at this season. Its easy-going proprietor had a large idea of comfort and pleasantness, and to a door-mat the interior must be the quintessence of luxury.

In an elegantly appointed chamber above stairs—Sir Kinnaird declined using the lower rooms after the thirty-first of October, in case there should be any damp about—at eight o'clock in the evening, upon the softest of couches drawn up to a sparkling fire, Sir Kinnaird was taking tea.

There was a bijou tea-pot worth a hundred pounds if a penny; three tiny cups and saucers as valuable; a cream-ewer, of the time of Louis XIV., with sugar-vase to match; the whole upon a miniature tray, placed upon a low ebony table made the exact height to accommodate the Baronet upon this couch, without the pain of distending a single nerve.

But inasmuch as there was only Sir Kinnaird and his servant present, it will be wondered why three cups were placed?

Did the gentleman expect friends to tea? No, the gentleman did not have friends to tea! Had he taken a hint from whist, and sat down to tea with a dummy, through sheer loneliness? Nothing of the kind,—he did like loneliness, and did not like dummies! Loved to look upon this old china, perhaps—some heirloom? Not at all,—he had drunk tea from these several times, but not yet even exerted himself to notice their pattern. The truth was Sir Kinnaird entertained strong aversion to the contact with anything too hot or too cold, and to remedy drinking tea too hot, while at the same time to secure temperately heated china, he made use of the trio of trifles, and doubtless was all the happier.

Simmons, Sir Kinnaird's private attendant, stood behind his master's couch, but within reach of the table, to spare the Baronet the slight effort of assisting himself.

"Now, Simmons, we will try again."

The recent trial had been a fiasco, owing to the fragrant beverage not pouring forth the exact shade to please the fastidious drinker. The lady-housekeeper, bent upon really pleasing Sir Kinnaird, took care, when the pot first came downstairs, to count the precise number of leaves therein, and from that time devoted an hour every afternoon to counting out a similar number from her pearl inlaid tea-caddy, in order that he should have it exactly the same.

Simmons warmed a cup; measured a spoon and three quarters of cream, looked carefully for the whitest lump of sugar, and was about to lower this with excess of caution in order that there should be no displeasing noise, when—

"Not too sweet, my good fellow, my palate rejects the saccharine this evening."

And while his attendant dutifully and with perfect respect looked the vase over for a lump some grains less, the martyr changed his position wearily, as though the endurance necessary to recline at ease was quite fatiguing. Something in the fire distracted the Baronet's attention, something in the fire fidgeted Sir Kinnaird Dalton, and Sir Kinnaird Dalton was not to be fidgeted by fire or any other element. Simmons moved round immediately, with wonderful quietness,

but immediately. There was not a sound while he raised the poker with an exquisite skill, and held the deadly weapon with a firm grip; then a low cough—a premonitory warning that might have been clothed in swan's-down, and—

"By your leave, I will slightly raise the fire, Sir Kinnaird?"

"Do; just remove that coal, crackling, and fizzing, and kicking up a devil of a row! Can't think why they will do it! Worst of winter. Fireplace the desperado of civilization, and ruin to the nerves of sensitive folk. Wait, please: now!"

Sir Kinnaird held his white hands close upon those delicate shell-like ears, and in spite of this, and although the operation was performed with consummate nicety, winced painfully.

After this his servant returned to his position as before, and permitted the fluid to trickle from the diminutive spout until the cup was three parts full. Mr. Simmons would not have permitted an extra drop to over-weigh the china, he knew just precisely the capacity of his master's strength. Something was wrong still: Sir Kinnaird was gazing with speculative interest at his tea, something was thereon or therein Simmons could not see, and Simmons was troubled. The Baronet was about to speak, and might throw some light on it.

"Something floating here—can't think how 'tis so many things get floating that ought not to!"

"Allow me, Sir Kinnaird."

"You are very good; thank you." The private attendant removed a little "stranger."

"Pass it to me, please—or perhaps you'll see if he has started?"

Simmons walked respectfully to the most remote corner of the room, placed the piece of stalk upon the back of his hand, and silently, decorously, and, in the usual manner, obtained the information. He approached his master with solemnity. Sir Kinnaird, upon raising his leisurely patrician head, put the query by a look, and Simmons replied, with the gravity of a Lord Chancellor,—

"I expect him this evening, Sir Kinnaird."

"I beg he won't trouble, for I really am not equal to it!"

Simmons adjusted a cushion below his master's elbow, aware

by old experience that, whether in bed or on the couch, if two feathers did become united, Sir Kinnaird's delicate framework was certain to detect it, and suffer agony in consequence. Many a time, in the middle of the night, Simmons had been summoned from a calm sleep to rectify a catastrophe of the kind, and effect an immediate divorce with as gentle skill as was possible.

Something on the wall next disturbed Sir Kinnaird Dalton, and nothing in existence could be permitted to do this; rather should the wall be removed. It was the flickering of the firelight upon the burnished gold of a picture-frame, and without a word the confidential servant walked upon tip-toe, jumped with unerring dexterity upon a chair, and removed the picture. The wall paper was of French exquisiteness, and elfins gambolled in and out of garlands; but the same light caused these to flit without regularity or symmetry, and anything without regularity or symmetry was not to be allowed in any residence in the occupancy of a Dalton: Simmons placed a screen, and darkened the chubby limbs of the riotous troupe.

Then was heard a terrific ringing of the great bell which commonly announced a call.

"I will go to bed—tell them I am indisposed—or at least unequal to reception. What a time of night to make that awful din! Oblige me by seeing into it, and have the wire cut."

With an expression of affliction Simmons retired backward. Outside was a white sheepskin rug, and after cautiously closing the door, he raised the rug above the bottom of this, in order that no stealthy current of cold should penetrate beneath, following upon the disorder which appeared prevalent below stairs.

There was indeed exceeding great confusion below stairs for a mansion conducted upon principles of model tranquillity.

Simmons heard an unseemly shuffling of feet, and a muffled contention, as though the servitors were impeding some one whose entrance was pressed with perseverance; and, much scandalized, he hastened to the scene, fearful that the disaster would destroy Sir Kinnaird's rest for many a day and night to come.

"Hush, hush!" implored the thoughtful fellow, "Do you not know our master is anything but strong this evening? Such disorder may take fatal effect—what is it all about?"

"Here's an old man clamouring to see the Earl; we have told him no Earl lives here, but he won't take no for an answer."

Simmons at once went to the entrance-hall, where a pinched and careworn old man, with an aristocratic profile, stood with utmost politeness but resolute.

"I am Sir Dickson Cheffinger—I have not my card, but bear the name to the Earl, and I am sure he will see me; it is upon urgent business."

Now Simmons, from long living with noble families was strongly averse to a scene, and he had acquired a method of circumventing obnoxious visitors, which proved of inestimable service in Sir Kinnaird's household. He civilly ushered this gentleman into a small room—the farthest removed from the suite occupied by Sir Kinnaird—and invited the stranger to sit down for a few minutes. This Sir Dickson courteously declined, and thought he infinitely preferred his own man James to this well-dressed individual sleek and urbane as a dancing-master. He again expressed a desire to see the Earl, upon urgent business.

"Perhaps I may explain, sir, this is Eagle Hall."

"I know it; just what I want; I've come from town on purpose by rail."

"Sir Kinnaird Dalton, Baronet, is the proprietor here, sir!"

"Bless me, yes—now you put it quietly I do remember that to be the name; I've been knocking my head up against the Earl of Dartmouth; but never mind; Sir Dalton will see me. Tell him Sir Dickson Cheffinger solicits an audience!"

"You will excuse me, sir, but Sir Kinnaird Dalton's state of health does not admit of his giving audience at the best of times, and this evening he is dangerously indisposed."

"So much the more reason why I should see him—the man may die before I can come in the morning. Please take my card in to Sir Dalton."

Simmons was much shocked, this person nonplussed even his phlegmatic assurance; he adopted a resistful attitude.

"You understand, sir, our master expects us to preserve him from the intrusion of strangers who may call at all sorts of times and seasons."

"My patience! I wonder what your master would say to my reception-rooms, thronged from morning until night! Suppose I made a trouble of receiving my guests, where do you think they would be? Out in the cold I take it. But it pleases me to see 'em, and I don't keep them waiting in the entrance hall, or in a downstairs room. When your master calls upon me he will be admitted to my presence at once."

Simmons began to think the man must be some very great sham or a very great person; he inclined to the latter, and made concession,—

"The best I can do, sir, is to go to Sir Kinnaird, and see if he is willing to grant you an audience.'

"Grant me an audience indeed! Any one would suppose you served the Monarch of Timbuctoo!"

With a very horrified expression Simmons withdrew, while the man people thought mad sat down, a pleasant smile upon the lined face. He was gaining his point, and that went a long way with Sir Dickson Cheffinger.

Simmons returned cautiously to his master, and as he entered started, with a heavy heart. Sir Kinnaird was stretched, apparently lifeless, upon the couch; but bending over him devotedly, the attendant discovered his master was calmly sleeping; and what sleep it was! The respiration of an infant could not be more untroubled. And while Simmons looked he shuddered, thinking of the ordeal in store for the unconscious fugitive from worry.

It would never do to awaken Sir Kinnaird Dalton, such vandalism would be outrage, in the opinion of this finished gentleman's gentleman; therefore Simmons leaned an elbow upon the mantel and waited; he would on no account have taken the liberty of sitting even in the presence of a sleeping master. It was while standing thus he heard a quiet voice say,—

"Well, Simmons, have you set it straight?"

It was Sir Kinnaird, who had simply roused himself from one of those languid reveries when to speak was too much exertion.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Kinnaird, I thought you were sleeping."

"No; was going off, but the corner of my coat or some awfully hard thing stopped me. Tell me the time."

Simmons consulted the timepiece on the mantel, and in a low tone informed him it was half-past eight.

"I make bold to tell you, sir, a gentleman is below who wishes to see you upon important business; he sends up the name of Sir Dickson Cheffinger."

"You know me well enough to communicate an answer without giving me the trouble. I do not say I am displeased —I am null and void, I cannot, under a certain term of hours, realize myself being so situated." Sinking back, Sir Kinnaird appeared to sleep profoundly; but presently started under the influence of a sudden thought.

"Strange, but I cannot get it out of my head, he may have something to tell me relative to—to—er, Simmons!"

"Sir Kinnaird!"

"Just ask this person to send me up an inkling of his motive in desiring to see me."

Simmons retired, was absent a brief season, and returned.

Sir Kinnaird was not asleep, nor at all approaching it.

Upon receiving permission by a look, the attendant said, "I delivered your question, Sir Kinnaird, and the person replied that his business had connexion with the former holders of the estate."

"I thought so; you can admit him."

When Mr. Cheffinger was ushered into the room Sir Kinnaird still maintained the recumbent attitude, but raised his head slightly and looked a little curiously at the singular visitor. He could scarcely tell if prepossessed or not, but he devoutly hoped the person would not make much noise. Mr. Cheffinger advanced with every delicacy, and without noise.

"I am sorry to find you indisposed, my lord, sorry to trouble you at this inopportune moment."

"He will persist upon elevating me to the Peerage," thought Sir Kinnaird; "now if anything would bore me more than another it would be that." Then to the visitor, "Yes, it is awkward; I had two minds about seeing you, but am interested in all concerning my predecessors here, therefore waived convenience; but you won't keep me long, please!"

"Certainly not" (looking in the direction of Simmons, standing mute as an Egyptian). "We might converse more pleasantly alone." (Sir Kinnaird inclined his head, Simmons did not see it; the visitor addressed him) "Lord Dalton signifies you may retire!"

Simmons remained perfectly stationary, but looking towards Sir Kinnaird, caught a responsive glance implying the assenting wish, and retired with undeviating obedience and respect.

"Now, sir, we are alone."

"I will not detain your lordship long. I have the honour to be acting for the Rev. Westley Garland of Brighton, in a matter of private munificence. Mr. Garland does much good; he has helped myself; a Cheffinger never forgets a service! I was requiring some engagement for leisure time, revenues of my estates not being yet forthcoming; and, very kindly, Mr. Garland deputed me to undertake a commission of delicacy. Mr. Garland is interested in the late lady of this mansion, in her little girl; he was the intimate friend of her husband, Sir Lionel Travers; he would help them. Conscientiously I have been upon the track. I traced Lady Travers and Miss Travers to the park gates of Lord Travers, and have since failed to make progress. I have recently seen Mr. Garland in London; I recommence with vigorous interest this absorbing pursuit. It was a suggestion on Mr. Garland's part that I should call upon your lordship, who he assured me would afford any information in your power, and would receive me with perfect courtliness, which your lordship has, I must gratefully acknowledge."

It was all very rambling, with odd mixing up of styles and titles, but there seemed something in it, some seed of interest in the welfare of dear old Lionel's unfortunate wife and child,

and it only needed this to enlist Sir Kinnaird's sympathy; ay, and a sympathy mighty as any feeling he had ever experienced. It was there, beneath the natural or assumed repose and undisturbed serenity, and he was alert to the fact that another, and a Minister—the most popular man of his time—was anxious concerning the fate of Mrs. Travers and her daughter, was actively exercising himself about the honoured memory of Lionel; and Sir Kinnaird said to himself, "I declare now I could clasp that fellow Garland's hand more warmly than that of any man I know."

Sir Kinnaird himself had those at work upon this very business, and was at no illiberal cost in his indefatigable efforts to follow up the clue. He had believed this person to be seeking audience to further his own investigations, but it proved to be on account of those directed by the Minister. Sir Kinnaird was never equal to discussing celebrities, nor bearing them in mind; but in common with the rest of mankind he had heard of this Minister, and felt rather glad so important a person was enlisted in their cause.

"I am extremely indebted to your friend for his good opinion; my nerves do not admit of my seeing people in the general way, but I am glad to know yourself and friend are sympathizers with this lady, whom I consider very hardly used. I don't think I can help you, I wish I could; I should be as glad as any one to hear of their reappearance upon our planet."

It was all said so quietly the visitor was half in doubt as to its genuineness, and was a little afraid of a something underlying the words; something in the manner, it might be mocking irony, it might be a delicate cynicism—Mr. Cheffinger did not like it, but passed no remark; he had not crossed paths with a being of the kind before, and did not know such cynical armour may shield the most tenderly sensitive of natures.

The Baronet was reclining at luxurious ease, head back upon his interlaced hands, eyes carefully shaded from glare of the lamp, yet with a flood of softened light upon the cheek. A line here and there might indicate that Sir Kinnaird was

anything but so young as he seemed; but more conclusive than these were the tranquil manners which are alone possible when years have lapsed to the halcyon era that succeeds the feverish unrest of the first three decades of man's existence.

"Of course, we do not know that Mrs. Travers has remained in England; it seems to be a circumscribed space to confine research to!"

Poor Sir Dickson looked scared: he did not feel in the least equal to more extended travel.

"It is in my power to help you some steps farther than Beresford Court," continued the Baronet; "Mrs. Travers was for some few days resting at a farm by there, from whence she went to London; I do not know what for, but in all probability to seek for some ladylike occupation; if so, I shall no doubt hear where all in good time; it is utterly useless, indeed exceedingly improper, to flurry oneself about anything lost, strayed, or stolen; sure to turn up; or, if not, it is our duty to pray the finder may be caused as little annoyance as possible."

Mr. Cheffinger thought of this languid piece of self very much as the nervous cleric thought of Paley, who, at dinner one day, feeling inconvenienced by a draught of air, directed the attendant to "shut that window behind me, and open one lower down behind one of the curates." But Mr. Cheffinger had gleaned some little information, and felt proportionately grateful.

"Should you happily learn of the whereabouts, perhaps, my lord, you would drop a line to—to—I dare not say to myself, I so frequently change my hotel—say to the Rev. Westley Garland, Brighton?"

"I shall be pleased to do so. If equal to it, I would run over and see your friend. I should much like to know him; but you have no idea, Sir Dickson, how I should suffer for many months afterwards from the effects of the exertion: some bodies will not bear overtaxing—mine is one."

"I can understand; your lordship experiences fatigue: but I do assure you," said the man they thought mad, with solemnity, "if any one is worth suffering fatigue for, it is the Minister!"

"Well, sir, I have told you, that in the event of my gaining intelligence likely to interest Mr. Garland, I will write to him, or instruct my Secretary to do so!"

"Most happy, I'm sure!"

Both gentlemen looked over to the portion of the room in shadow from whence the politely sarcastic voice proceeded, and Cheffinger shuddered, for from his position he could see the mocking face, the weird, glittering eyes that turned him cold. Sir Kinnaird, without stirring, coolly remarked,—

"I did not hear you enter, Mr. Barnard."

"I am so careful of your nerves, sir; I know with your susceptibility to noise the lighter the footstep the more agreeable;—I came in soon after Sir Dickson Cheffinger, whom I have the honour to be acquainted with!" At a stride he stood by the side of that unfortunate gentleman, who had thus unwittingly put his head into the lion's den, holding forth a talon-like white hand that curlingly gripped the trembing digits of Sir Dickson.

"Good gracious!" murmured Sir Kinnaird wearily, but not as in the least surprised, so prepared was he for the supernatural appearing or disappearing of his diabolical Secretary, or for any acquaintance he might possess: terribly annoyed, nevertheless.

"Has Sir Dickson Cheffinger partaken of refreshment?" inquired Mr. Noel Barnard hospitably.

"No, Sir Dickson Cheffinger has not!" replied Sir Kinnaird, stretched upon his back, following Cupid at kiss-in-the-ring with the elfins, and worried exceedingly by the flickering of the firelight upon Sir Dickson Cheffinger's greasy old hat; which, from continual mislaying, he had taken to holding very tight whenever off his head; and which at this meeting he fidgeted with until it became like unto an uncertain Catherine-wheel before the quivering Baronet.

"Then, perhaps, Sir Dickson will do me the honour to accompany me downstairs, where I will see that Eagle Hall shall yield its best in recognition of Sir Dickson's mission!" And, no sign coming from the couch, where, apparently tired out, the noble martyr rested passively unconscious, Sir Dickson

assented, and followed the tall form forth to the shadowy corridor, on to the shadowy landing, down the shadowy stairs, across the shadowy hall, and into the small, plainly furnished parlour reserved by the Secretary for his private occupancy.

"Sit down, my dear Sir Dickson, I'll go and see what our larder provideth."

The poor gentleman thought it chilling after the sumptuous elegance of the pretty chamber above stairs; neither had he desire to eat; but Mr. Barnard was not a gentleman he could say "no" to, and there was a mystery, legal and otherwise, surrounding him like a fog; so that the most and the least Sir Dickson could do was to remain inoffensively agreeable to anything.

Mr. Barnard returned, followed by a maid bearing a variety of excellent trifles from the epicurean larder, and Sir Dickson partook sparingly and of the very plainest of the fare, rather vexing his kind entertainer, who, having selected them himself, recommended first one dish and then another as particularly worthy the honour of Sir Dickson's attention; but the ordinary rule of abstinence observed by the poor gentleman decided him upon declining these, with thanks.

After the ceremony Mr. Barnard said, "It's an exceedingly dark night, and rough walking down the hill. I'll bear you company as far as the town, and talk over our matter of business; my respected partner has ascertained something eminently important from Sir Claude himself, which I know you will feel interested in hearing."

"I shall think it kind, sir; but it is taking you out on an unpleasant evening."

"Oh, don't think of it, I beg; I'm sure, to be of the slightest service will be a pleasure; there will be a particular satisfaction attending it! You are sure you won't take a little whisky before turning out into the cold?"

"Thank you, I never take it!"

"Then I do, always; so you'll excuse me?" Mr. Cheffinger bowed with grave politeness to Mr. Barnard, and Mr. Barnard bowed with grave politeness to Mr. Cheffinger; and Mr. Barnard took a little whisky, explaining pleasantly,—"My

sympathy with Ireland is extreme, my regard for Scotland uncommon; I blend my national love in capital spirits, singing GOD SAVE THE QUEEN! Come, Sir Dickson, we will venture, and if you would see the lovely lanes of Devon at their most impressive, see them by this light!"

"And why am I excluded from this artist's stroll?" It was Sir Kinnaird, who sauntered negligently in, equipped for walking, gracefully collected, and not troubling to notice the scowl upon the pleasant face of Mr. Barnard.

"Never knew you turn out this time of night before!" muttered the Secretary.

"Well, the fact is, I never had so much occasion; the last friends of poor Lionel Travers came and went by daylight. Er—Simmons—just walk behind with my stick, it is too heavy for pleasant company. Now, Sir Dickson Cheffinger, your arm."

CHAPTER IX.

APOTHEOSIS OF THE FELINE.

Looking out of the window of her tasteful breakfast-room, Mrs. Vincent saw the postman approaching; and it was characteristic of this charming person that in lieu of becoming flurried with expectancy, as are some good folk upon receipt of an expected missive, she merely placed the crested trifle in the pocket of her neat morning gown, and proceeded with directions respecting dinner, with commissions to the trading establishments having the honour to serve the Mistress of the Cottage, with instructions for the gardener, and a message to the laundryman, and a variety of incidental matters connected with home rule which the lady was far too methodical and systematic to neglect for the reading of letters. But when all was neatly arranged and in perfect order, she did sit down for a quiet quarter of an hour over the letter to her hand that day. It bore the crest of the Lindons upon the seal, and she cut round this, not because she had waited so many years for the coming of this crested thing, but that the seal might be copied smaller for her own use.

"There is no telling how soon I may need to write letters signed *Anna Lindon*," said this far-seeing diplomatist curtly to herself; "the middle class use monograms, and the twisting of initials is not in accord with my notions of regularity; I like a good, honest crest, something awe-inspiring to the vulgar, something those without the pale cannot imitate. All my life I've hankered after a crest! I've gone carefully back as far in our pedigree as it is safe to go; for somewhere one of us departed this life for sheep-

stealing; I have stirred up our ancestors prudently, disinterred old records, inclusive of black-profiled eminence and worth, and some coverless Bibles valuable for their registry-sheets; and I am sorry to say our people were inferior, in point of caste, of reputation, and of morals, and I have been quite unable to discover sign or symbol, bird or beast, capable of being construed into a respectable crest. It is time there was one in the family, if there ever is to be one. Let me but possess this haughty device of the Lindons, and I'll—I'll embroider my nightcap all over with it!"

Smiling pleasantly, the widow leisurely, yet all daintily removed the letter from its sheath.

At the first glance she saw the writing was tremulously done, excitable penmanship, strokes recklessly darting hither and thither, letters that seemed dashed broadcast, words of lunatic wildness, helter-skelter above and below their line, blurred, misplaced interjections, and a troubled surface inexpressibly sad. She had gone through his books so often, the fluent manly hand was familiar as any writing in her possession, but this was not of the same, there was riven, smitten, anguished dismay and grief underlying it, there was the passion of instant emergency, the half-paralyzed confronting of some deadly peril.

She read it again and again with a wonderful relish, and a little approving lady-like smile.

My Friend,

I did not expect so soon to write you sorrowing. I dare not think of the decision you arrived at when considering my Lena's portrait. How your heart will thrill with sympathy upon reading that I am bereft of my darling. I returned to find her fled from here, whither no one knows, and all my efforts thus far fail of discovery. I am so stricken by this blow I can scarcely write with sequence; you will pardon this. Ah! my friend, how little I contemplated this new great misfortune when we talked of that which has been since my last trouble the one consolation of life! Your friendly clasp of the hand was very welcome to me; the expression of your

solicitude will now be as grateful. We agreed upon this interchange, or I would not intrude my sorrow upon your notice; and I have told you the story; its sequel will grieve you.

Ever faithfully,
LINDON.

"Not exactly, my lord! I think it serves you thoroughly well right! A pretty thing, if all the men in the land were to do as you have done, when they ought to get lawfully rid of their wives and provide for the widows! Well, Lorry, my beautiful, roguish Lorry, will have less travelling to do. I'll walk to Seaborough and telegraph him that a letter is on the road. Only to think of this now! Is it not wonderful how things work round? It's a complete piece of fortune, his heart will be so tenderly prepared for that to come. And the men are clearing off, next week the furnishers will be here, and a month—a month—and my queenly traitress, clinging so boldly to this honoured name and title, will be here. Now let me think. What's the time? 9.15; at 10 a train to town, good: that friendly welcome clasp of hand shall be repeated, the solicitude so grateful shall be expressed! Leave him to the friendly solicitude of that Mrs. Brandon, and sit here patient another ten long years while this attentive, thoughtful sympathizer fulfils the mission I should be engaged upon? Not quite! Run upstairs and put your things on, Anna, and waive the unpleasantness of travelling alone; this immediate necessity does not come every day. We're going to penetrate this boarded retreat, and demolish Madame Brandon and the rest!"

And in her chamber, at an elegant little writing-desk always kept there, she wrote this note to Lorry:—

My dear boy,

A hurried line to tell you the pretty bird has flown; this will relieve you of preliminary difficulty; of course she is in London, they always fly thither: but I shall gain further information in a day or two, when I will write you again.

I hope you are very good, and working very hard, yet sparing leisure to think sometimes of your fond and loving Mother.

P.S.—Be very careful in the great City where there are so many temptations. Remember your dear Mother's precepts and example, and be very particular.

P.P.S.—Be sure and keep your eyes open in the streets, and if you see a pretty girl anything at all resembling the portrait, speak to her, my darling, speak to her!

She then habited herself in the chaste costume reserved for travelling, no outrageous style for the attracting of notice upon the platforms, but a useful yet becoming fashion in quiet colour, the design of which would mix in the crowd without winning attention, yet if observed would be admired for its taste.

Then, the maid bearing a small bag, the lady proceeded across the Green and along the village street, and Sleperton wondered with a mighty wonder. Then by way of Seaborough Old Town, and at dinner that day there was great concern in Seaborough Old Town. Then through Seaborough to the station, and a thrill went the length of township.

The neat maid, having received specific injunctions, quitted her mistress, that lady betaking herself to the telegraph office, where she despatched this message to her son:—

Take no steps until hearing from me. Letter on the road. Meanwhile make use of your time in London.

By the ten o'clock train for town this business-like person followed in the wake of her telegram. Upon arrival she checked the desire to take a cab to Lorry's and chance his being at home, and instructed the man to drive instead to King's Cross. Twenty-five minutes to wait for starting of a train to the North! And she fretted at that, sitting upon a seat on the platform, following joining of the boards with her umbrella, looking up slyly from below the long lashes at the men and women walking up and down, and saying to herself,—"My future husband will eclipse them all."

It was slow; she walked to the book-stall and looked at the

books, a very favourite occupation, more so than buying; she read a little love-bit from this, and a little love-bit from that, and skimmed the cream of half-a-dozen, as encouragement. She looked at all the pictures, much taken by the scene where a very neat and lady-like person stood at an altar with a handsome fellow uncommonly like Lord Harold; and finally purchasing one that took her fancy, was absorbed for the remainder of the journey. And then commenced the memorable advance upon St. Aubyn's Fortress. Whither we will precede the widow, to learn how matters are progressing.

It appeared as though Mrs. Brandon was making considerable progress; indeed her softly solicitous manner and invariable composure did exercise a species of soothing effect, and her condolence, never obtrusive, always well-timed, if not consoling, was at least not displeasing.

Mr. Arden drove over every day, and although he had been unable to throw any light on the mysterious affair (he was ignorant of that encounter by the garden), yet the visits of his kind old friend helped to sustain St. Aubyn, who recognized the deep sympathy prompting the daily attention; and more than this, the spiritual support delicately placed in its fairest and most benign light.

One thing may be noted. Mr. Arden did not credit Martha Saxe with having any hand in Miss St. Aubyn's disappearance.

The old pastor's love of Mrs. Brandon was not increased, but as St. Aubyn's was one of those fine natures disliking above all things any insinuation levelled at those in his employ, the question was avoided; and as the lady seldom favoured the pastor with a glimpse of her black and white presence, she did not cause him, personally, any discomfort or inconvenience.

To say that St. Aubyn had by any degree overcome the loss of his treasure would be to make an erroneous admission, the dull, benumbing pain was present like a canker; especially when alone did the terrible consciousness prostrate him. Hence imperceptibly yet most certainly did he find some beneficial result accrue from the society of Mrs. Brandon.

He knew that she had removed everything that would remind him of Lena, and, by reminding, cause him untold anguish; and he thought this very kind of her. She never alluded by so much as a word to the child; had changed the room where they partook of meals; had removed the garden chair whereon the beautiful princess had been wont to read reclining in the sun, in order that it should not be within sight from the windows; had made another bedchamber luxurious for St. Aubyn, transferring furniture, and having fires there daily, with intent he should not have to pass *her* chamber door; had folded the lion-skins whereon the romp had been used to roll, and stored them far away in a distant garret, peppered and brown-papered; for Hortense, who was privately making all arrangements for assuming the mistress-ship per matrimony, had no thought or intention of allowing valuable skins, or "wild beast hides," as she termed them, to become a prey to that lively insect the moth.

And all that she did was appreciated by St. Aubyn, as such deeds are by those labouring with some horrible sorrow and striving to be brave when all the time one's very sinews seem parting beneath the strain. He was not one of those who can break away from sorrow by a frantic descent upon the whirling pleasure of a metropolitan season, nor of those who go rushing off to Norway or some entirely new tract where they may, perchance, forget. There was no happy Lethe from which this man might drink, no *nepenthe* that would assuage his grief. Yet even as we are grateful to the hand held kindly forth, bearing the cooling draught when low with fever, he was grateful for the forethought of this woman. And each day waited issue of the skill of those his gold had sent upon pursuit; the first talent in the detective department, chief experts at tracking those daily disappearing, master craftsmen upon trail, ay, human bloodhounds, the prime reserve of the leading private inquiry offices, those subtle and swift as hawks and as certain, and the most clever men Scotland Yard could furnish. And with these alert and active, these spreading anet from bound to bound of the huge City, these applying their utmost ability, spurred by the enormous reward offered, and proposed

to be doubled should the child be brought to him within three days; encouragement such as the oldest detective could not remember; could more be done? No, he admitted not. He was not fitted for entering upon any portion of the search himself; such occupation would have been loathsome, strong as his love was, but by all other means it was possible to think of without his own personal action did he testify to the intensity of his painful interest in this grave pursuit.

Mrs. Brandon knew something of it all, but nothing like the extent to which operations had been carried; she yet knew sufficient to cause her unlimited disgust, and to again and again repeat to herself that query of so vital moment,—

"Whatever is there in the chit to warrant all the fuss?"

Eminently cautious, the lady placed before herself the contingency—it was scarcely probable, but one never knows what those clever ones may unearth—of Lena's being restored: how would it affect herself? Well, this would just depend upon the sort of construction the child would put upon her (Mrs. Brandon's) conduct. She, of course, in the event of such an accident, must appear the most delighted in the house at her return, must greet her with excess of affection that would outshine even the welcome of St. Aubyn himself. She was not demonstrative, no, she was not demonstrative; but, to save her neck, could exceed her habitual enthusiasm. But in good sooth, the lady calculated upon a very different termination to this. If Miss Lena St. Aubyn did not look out, as she scornfully said to herself over that precious face within her locket, she would return to find Papa had taken a Mamma, and then let Miss Lena St. Aubyn see which way the wind blew!

Mrs. Brandon could tell as quickly as any one, and quicker than most people, the leaning and bearing of temperament and disposition, and she remarked, with quiet gratification, how that poor wounded soul, yearning for solace, inclined to her devilish sympathy. (A spade is never more necessarily called a spade than when under the conditions of hypocritical solicitude.)

It was a time of supreme anxiety with Mrs. Brandon, a time when she felt it incumbent to make hay while

the sun was behind a cloud. Accordingly upon an evening when St. Aubyn was sitting moodily smoking his hookah, trying to fix his attention upon publications of the Presidencies recently to hand, and failing lamentably; looking with disconsolate pain around that sumptuous interior where, monarch, he was more unhappy than the most wretched of those carvers in jet whose cottages flanked the pastoral field of his old clerical friend; sitting alone, reviewing vast sorrows and mighty griefs that oppressed the soul as by leaden weights, reviewing astonishing joys that strung them like jewels, or the more splendid beams of radiant dreams that quiver by us but a moment and are gone, and with all the retrospect endeavouring to catch up shreds which might betoken hope—although he felt with intense bitterness that, even did his child return, it would be no longer the Lena of old; and he was in the depth of this sorrowing reverie when there came a gentle tap upon the door, an exquisitely gentle tap, which the most wounded of hearts would not resent. It was Mrs. Brandon, with her thoughtful,—

"I feared you might be feeling dull, sir, and I venture to ask if I shall have a fire lighted, and the large candles?"

"You are very good! I have no objection."

And, of course, while this was proceeding it was natural she should quietly sit down to work, watching operations. Natural that by accident she should continue sitting, continue working, watching operations. Apparently he did not remark her presence, the clouds fragrant as the perfumed water through which they had passed wreathed about him, almost hiding the handsome face. She very gently proceeded with her needlework—a delicately slender needle, conveying the finest cotton, through the softest muslin manufactured—and very gently coughed. A denser cloud, a slight jerk at the silver bowl. Slowly the eyelids of the black and white lady lifted, serenely the fingers plied, while the keen eyes travelled round the drawing-room, where the panelled graining, the tracery of gold, the glistening rafters upon the golden-studded ceiling, were dim and beclouded; there was a lull, a hush, and she did not cough again. It was the season for speaking.

With voice so low it rather soothed than disturbed, stealing in and out those clouds, and not by a breath agitating the most sensitive, sweetened even by the transit, turned with a gentleness insinuating and subtle, burdened with a perfect well of sympathy, and by very modulation of its hesitative utterance, the half apology required by the intrusion, it was thus she commenced,—

"I do trust not to be thought insensible, Mr. St. Aubyn, to the finer feelings, if I venture to hope that your mind may be set at rest before very long; it pains me more than words can tell—to see you so melancholy and dispirited, your peace destroyed, your health suffering, that health so precious." A little pause here, just long enough to give him opportunity for reply, if so minded. There was no reply. "All right," she said to herself, "perhaps he'll speak presently;" and she continued,—"I shall appear very bold, but to me it seems a grievous injustice to yourself. Of course I know little of the story of your life, never having been one to enjoy the privilege of your confidence, but I am able to fathom much of it, and my heart bleeds for your past. More so than for the present, because Lena, dear rebel, had such thoroughly Bohemian tendencies."

"Not a word about Lena, if you please, Mrs. Brandon!" Her champion even in her faithlessness.

"Not a word is said *against* our darling; I but mention her name in tenderness; and, although your wounded heart forbids assent, you yet feel I speak the candid truth, and with the solicitude of *a mother*. Ah! had but that dear child a mother, some presiding guidance and governance in the household, what a wealth of love might be developed in that young bosom!"

"You will excuse me," said St. Aubyn, with grave displeasure, "her love needs no developing; I am satisfied her love for myself is perfect."

"I am sure of it," replied the quiet woman, with decision; "it is what I *so* much admire in her; I simply allude to the centring of that love. I need not tell yourself, of course well acquainted with our sex, that the love of a child of Miss

Lena's age is a very different thing to that solemn and sublime feeling entertained by some staid and spiritual woman whose life is passed partly upon this earth, and partly in a higher and better sphere altogether; one who, like yourself, may have known trouble, sorrow, treachery, and perfidy; one like yourself, with wound barely healed, yet one whose moral strength confers resignation, whose calm patience bestows unending peace. Such is the mother our dear, dear child needs, at her age so much! Happy the child who can lay her head back upon this mother's bosom, and whisper all her love for parent-guardian-friend!" This was spoken with plaintive earnestness, the very tone carrying conviction of the speaker's sincerity and disinterestedness. She was thinking, "That *ought* to do it!" when Williams appeared, rather flurried, and making signs to some person in the shadow, signs evidently the said person refused to recognize, for, advancing with considerable elegance and grace of movement, the redoubtable Anna Vincent confronted Hortense Brandon.

St. Aubyn arose with pleasure, and immediately gave his hand to the widow, who, saying to herself, "High time I came, I think!" bowed very graciously, while her friend introduced the ladies one to another.

"Mrs. Brandon, of whom you have heard me speak with esteem. My friend Mrs. Vincent,—an old friend!" said with that polish no term of seclusion will eradicate. The quick, restless eyes of the widow met the hard black orbs of St. Aubyn's sympathizer, and, as expected, found herself well matched. A very duel between these principals in finesse and state-craft was imminent. The widow administered a blow to begin with,—

"I thought the most satisfactory way of replying to your letter was by acknowledging it in person."

The adversary moved a step back, the black silk of her gown emitting a hissing sound, which the softer and more noiseless vestments of the other, falling fold within fold, seemed to despise as a trick, and ignore accordingly.

"This is quite an unexpected pleasure," replied St. Aubyn, with marked cordiality; "but however did you find the way to our remote and out-of-the-world retreat?"

"Well, you know, where there is a will there is a way,—at least one has to be made!" And with a very charming and playful smile the lady removed her bonnet.

"Mrs. Brandon will show you to a chamber—the best our house will furnish, Madam—and, believe me, I give you hearty welcome into Yorkshire!"

With her most elegant recognition of his courtesy, Mrs. Vincent bowed and expressed her thanks.

As requested, Mrs. Brandon conducted the visitor to the most luxurious of the upper chambers. When the maid had lighted toilet and other candles, and had retired, Mrs. Brandon, with grave and velvety politeness, begged the lady would mention any addition to her comfort their house could provide.

"Many thanks," said the other, looking round, "I think a fire later on,—nothing more."

This said the far-seeing woman because she was quite under the conviction the ruling deity of this solitary mansion, not being very well able to tumble her over the cliff, since she never walked upon the edge of anything, would not hesitate to put her between damp sheets, and Mrs. Vincent was much too partial to elegance of mien to brave the possibility of ungainly rheumatism.

The silk rustled, trailed over the carpet, hissed in the doorway framing the never-to-be-forgotten face, rigid and colourless as marble, with the brows and eyes, once grand features, and even now the noticeable point about the presentment; a faultlessly white collar and jet brooch, white cuffs meeting over the apron where hands joined as by geometric precision; not a tall woman, scarcely as tall as her rival, but standing in the doorway that instant at her tallest, breathing thick and quick as one breathes in sudden exigency, and taking in from that position the other standing in the glare of lights, youthful looking, with an exquisite bloom on cheek, a fascination of manner a heritage of itself, magnificent hair falling now unloosed far lower than the waist, a blithesome, debonair behaviour which, while captivating, was eminently well bred, and a grace of deportment striking and prepossessing; and taking this view at a glance, Mrs. Brandon considered it

a crisis. She was too good a general to betray annoyance, and too thorough a designer to experience confusion; her tactics were awfully disconcerted, but she believed she saw through it. Her belief came out in this very quiet remark,—

"I trust, Madam, Mr. Noel Barnard, last time you heard from him, was very well?"

The *coup* was tremendously sudden, but Mrs. Vincent was too consummate an artist and too habitually prepared for any side-thrust to be taken unawares: with perfect simplicity and particular frankness she replied,—

"Last time I heard of that astonishing being he was very well. You are interested in Mr. Noel Barnard?"

"Yes, Ma'am, I am, and in any friend of his!" Having said which with exasperating effect, the quiet lady, with a mock curtsey, retired, closing the door gently.

"As sure as my name is Anna Vincent, this is a pretty kettle of fish, an uncommonly deep move of Noel's—keeping himself acquainted with my lord's actions through this demure piece of goods!"

She looked leisurely round the apartment, in the drawers, in the wardrobe, inspected the rare ornaments upon the mantel, examined the texture of fabrics and upholstery, admired the bed-fittings, criticised pictures upon the walls, felt the weight of the thick curtains by the window, scrutinized the lace upon the pillows, noticed the stitching of the eider-down quilt, and, lastly, looked at herself in the great *cheval* glass, remarking to the reflection there presented,—

"If anything, Anna, you look the better for the journey; it's the keen wind. I declare my cheeks tingle now, but I do trust my nose isn't red! Now mind your p's and q's, and bear in remembrance the Lindon crest."

She rejoined the Master; the pale lady was at her work.

"You will take some refreshment?" asked St. Aubyn.

"Nothing, thanks, until your regular meals. What a delightful place you have here, up stairs and down!"

"Yes, it serves to pass life away in, or has served!" Said with pathetic sadness. "I hope your son is very well?"

"Very well, last time I heard from him; he is still in town. Lorry would like to see your pictures!"

"They are of little value, a few sketches made in the East."

"They are very beautiful. Do you not think so, Madam?" The lady addressed looked up from her work, and—

"I think all Mr. St. Aubyn's drawings evince unusual talent, Madam."

"May I see your books?" (eagerly interested,) "But no, it is taking you into the cold" (deeply solicitous). "Some other time—to-morrow morning."

"Nay," said the scholarly recluse, rising and leading the way to his collection, "we are not so indolent as all that, I hope! You will not find them as considerable as the library you are accustomed to, but such as we have are of value." And he preceded the lady, opening the door of an apartment upon the opposite side of the hall. She had proposed this, hoping for a little private conference, but, upon looking over her shoulder, saw the silent lady had followed them like a shadow. Without appearing the least in the way, or in any degree as interested, Mrs. Brandon was gently closing shutters, lighting tapers, brushing a speck or two of dust from one or other of the richly-bound volumes, with other unofficious movements sufficient plea for her presence.

Mrs. Vincent leisurely inspected the books with much interest, but the pale lady did not seem to go, and after a while the visitor asked,—

"Have you any music? Of course you would have!"

"We have an organ, and—a—harp!" by an effort, the eyes of both watching keenly.

"Dear me, how long it is since I played upon the organ! Not since the patron of our church and village went abroad." Mrs. Brandon noticed the man's face flush at that.

"I could not now play before any one, or I would ask you to let me see if I have quite forgotten those chants I at one time loved so well!" Mrs. Brandon quietly left the room.

CHAPTER X.

A QUESTION OF PROPRIETY.

Perhaps no one in town enjoyed the esteem of his fellows with more legitimate right than Sir Horace Vivian. The family was super-stainless: quarterings on the arms outrivalled each other in spotless associations; never a lineage came out so dazzling with pure antecedents; not a representative noble in Burke more stringent upon decorum. The Vivian household was indeed of unparalleled propriety. Of course to hope for a definition of the improper at the hands of Sir Horace would be vain, he really did not know what it was. Where would be found daughters reared with the exemplary care bestowed upon the Misses Vivian, most of whom had been trained in Edinburgh (where they also possessed a mansion), a sufficient guarantee of the discipline exercised? Where a man more aptly realizing the old legends of a perfect husband, or model father? This was well known. For the sake of her health Lady Vivian resided in Nice; for the sake of his health Sir Horace remained in London; yet no one could have continued to adhere to that code observed when her ladyship was present more closely than did Sir Horace. From the eldest to the youngest of them the Vivian family, and every member thereof, and every connexion of every member, together with the particular friends of the connexion, were the pink of propriety.

"One cannot be too discreet," said Sir Horace, and he really thought so.

Thus one of the prudent actions contingent upon this habitual foresight was the advertising for an extremely refined

and ladylike person to take the charge of his daughters when at home or upon their travels.

The result was the engagement of a lady emphatically answering to the description, who pleased Sir Horace extremely from first seeing her. With every desirable grace, an evident wish to please, gentle manners, a slight melancholy which, without being depressing, was fraught with winning sweetness, and an amiableness of disposition that won all their hearts, this was the invaluable companion now added to the establishment.

The lady's references and testimonials, signed by the manager of a leading Bank, were perfectly satisfactory, and Mrs. Esther Thompson, widow, entered at once upon her duties.

To the lady's great surprise (and secret sorrow) she learnt it was as travelling companion also she had been engaged, but she was so glad to secure this home and very liberal salary offered by Sir Horace, and liked the ladies of his household so well, the half idea of resigning it at once was overruled.

And with courier and two maids in attendance the party left town for Nice.

After they had gone the great house in the stately square seemed exceedingly lonely, with closed rooms, diminished servants, a general silence, and that deserted aspect such buildings wear when the family is away.

At first Sir Horace did not mind, for he was behindhand with his Quarterlies, and availed himself of the quiet to recover time. A great reader, Sir Horace was yet as particular in his literary choice, and as judicious in his critical application as in other things.

Blinds were down to preserve the carpets, the gold and white furniture was encased in holland, the conservatory looked dismal as a jungle—the glints of blue and crimson glass for the first time taking ecclesiastically solemn hue, the guest-chambers echoed with hollow, mocking sounds, and the broad stairs seemed dead with longing for a footstep.

Sir Horace resolved to close the house and stay at his hotel in Dover Street pending the return of his daughters, for it was

intolerably dull, and he was averse to intolerable dulness. Quietness he was attached to, but not the other.

Sir Horace gave his servants leave of absence until written for, and allowed them to go that day, intending to run down to Brighton by the six o'clock train out of London, and there pass the night and following day with an old literary friend who resided in Oriental Place.

But later on the gentleman altered his mind, and decided to go down in the morning instead. Unfortunately the servants had left for home, and Sir Horace was alone, the great house seeming more dull than ever. However, it was not worth going to the hotel for one night, he thought, and, having a quantity of loose papers about that needed sorting, arranging, and removing above stairs, he decided to spend this leisure evening upon the task. Sir Horace always performed this office himself, having an idea nobody else could or would place his papers as he wanted them.

It was a long operation, and tables and chairs were fast disappearing beneath the divided literature.

There was an extract to read back at one place, and an article at another; comparison of notes between journals, and reference to notes and quotations of his own, all of which took up time; these arranging seasons come pleasantly, possess a charm of their own, and the hours slip on when thus engaged without much progress being made. In the midst, on the carpet, lamp in the centre, busts coming out pallid, staring stonily from the dusk corners at their ordinarily grave companion upon his knees, and up to the neck in fugitive learning: a large fire making all as cheerful as solitude under the conditions could be. Requiring odd numbers to make up the sets, Sir Horace left the library for the dining-room. The hall lamp caused a tall, monkish shadow to fall upon the inlaid colouring. This reminded him he had not secured the back offices, and he proceeded upon that necessary mission.

The whole of the back premises were covered over; the spacious yard opened by the tradesmen's entrance to a lane bounded by the square mews; lamps were lighted here after dark, and the police were vigilant. Thus Sir Horace was

"He stood before the foundling, hesitating upon the course to pursue."—PAGE 143.

more than surprised to discover a little girl, asleep, upon the doorstep of the servants' entrance. Never having been placed in so curious a predicament, he stood before the foundling hesitating upon the course to pursue, wondering whatever his friends would think, could they but see him in so embarrassing a position! What to do he really did not know. To summon the police would be to create some scandal, from which he shrank as from the plague; to smuggle the innocent down the lane and hence would, in the event of his being detected, draw some unpleasant suspicion upon himself, and he was so very particular! He never was so unpleasantly placed in all his life, and the shades of a long line of prim and proper Vivians seemed peering upon him in this stupendous dilemma.

To be voluntarily cruel was contrary to his instincts. He felt glad that he was at least a family-man, and really understood the decorous treatment of a female child, even in such an awful emergency as this. A clothes-prop was leaning to a wall, and by its grateful aid Sir Horace awakened the gentle sleeper, keeping at a respectable distance. The child awoke upon the instant, as though accustomed to uncertain waking; there was but little light, yet sufficient to convey to the scrupulous baronet there was nothing to be very alarmed at. The child rising, stood respectfully, ready to tend her simple explanation.

"Little girl," said Sir Horace kindly, "you have gone to bed in a strange place; will you tell me how you come to be asleep in my yard, if you please?"

This, then, was Sir Horace Vivian, and Ella's heart throbbed violently; she had hoped, when stealing up this back way, after the long walk following her escape, that one of the servants of the mansion would tell her if Mrs. Thompson was within; she was of far too heroic a stamp to divulge relationship, or disclose it was her mother she had come to seek; and how eagerly she had trusted that dear parent might be there! She had meant, without distressing her by a description of what had occurred, to say she had accompanied a man to London who promised to see her to Mr. Percival's, intending to remain there until her mother came, and how the man had failed

of his promise; and, remembering Sir Horace Vivian's name, she had found out the way by asking, and had come for but a glimpse. This was the guileless scheme to save her mother terror and distress, following upon which she would let Mr. George Percival take her back to the farm. But it had all been postponed by her finding the whole place silent and apparently empty. Utterly overcome by this new misfortune —and it was much for this tender one to realize—she had sat down upon the doorstep, crying bitterly; then, tired out and wearied beyond measure, she had gone off to sleep in the dim twilight, lulled by the City's hum.

So, then, this was Sir Horace Vivian.

He looked kind and noble; she did not, after the first effect of surprise, feel very afraid of him, indeed she thought she could love this benign and pleasant-featured gentleman. With a prettiness of manner that won upon him instantly, she accounted for the singularity of her being there.

She had come from the country, had not been certain of the address where her mother lived, had been lost, found her way thither, had knocked, hoping one of the servants would kindly give her a piece of bread and butter, and, finding all still and silent, had been overcome by fatigue and hunger, and had sat upon the doorstep and gone off to sleep.

Her eyes traversed the majesty of the tall gentleman before her, upward to the kind face she was conciliating and making kinder, and she saw that her story was told to some purpose.

"Just stand inside, and let's have a look in the larder, I dare say we can find you a piece of bread and butter!"

She followed him with docility, he fastening up the back offices behind them, with the half-muttered remark, "Whatever we do we shall not go out this way."

In the housekeeper's room he placed the lamp on the table, and transfixed the trespasser with a most magisterial look. She did not quail, and moreover was exceedingly beautiful.

"I cannot say you look as abashed as you might do!" he said. Whereat she smiled, and with such show of confidence the inflexible baronet thawed with uncommon rapidity.

"It seems to me you are in about as miserable a plight as

could well be, I am exceedingly sorry for you; in the first place, let us see what our larder will provide, after which you will be in better spirits for talking over what is to be done, a question, I confess, I don't know how to decide upon, because to allow you to go out for the purpose of knocking at people's doors asking for your mother is absurd. I'm sure I don't know what to advise or how to act."

Meantime the region of provision was discovered, new ground to Sir Horace, equally with the object of his compassion. The refectory was liberally stored, and Ella was soon deep in the mystery of hare-pie, following this up by cheese-cakes.

This ceremony performed to their mutual satisfaction, it became no longer prudent to shirk the serious matter of the child's disposal, and Sir Horace looked reflectively in the beautiful eyes, in all his life he had never seen anything so beautiful.

He wondered, what if he took her with him and helped the search in person? Not to be thought of. Suppose it was to leak out, what construction would people put upon it? What if he obtained for her a nice quiet room, in some nice quiet house, kept by some nice quiet couple? That class of person always knows some one who is acquainted with somebody else who is connected with whomever one would most keep anything from. Negatived accordingly. Suppose they did try the back way and eloped *viâ* the mews? Always somebody prying about, looks bad, summary of the very vulgar, most shocking fate that can befall one. Declined in consequence. Poor Ella! Did she but know all the commotion her small life had caused in one quarter and another, she must inevitably shrink into the earth, abashed.

Something else weighed with Sir Horace. There was an air about this child indicative of gentle birth and delicate rearing, and the idea of expelling her was hurtful to his finer feelings. To cast her adrift upon the great City, seemed barbarous; he felt for this little friendless one, and, as representing a knightly race, would serve her in this peril-time, and *per fas et nefas* make her at all events happy and at rest for the time being.

"You shall not turn out to-night; there are twenty unoccupied rooms in this house, and it is odd if you cannot have one of them. I don't think" (musing) "there would be any impropriety in it; I don't quite like the idea of it, but I see no other course."

She looked so innocent and unconscious of impropriety herself he felt half annoyed with himself at the thought.

Inviting her to accompany him to the library, chivalrous Sir Horace proceeded thither, closely followed by his fragile companion.

She picked her way daintily in and out the ancient tomes, and looked down upon the litter with a respect that pleased him vastly.

"I dare say you never saw so many books and papers before, my child?"

"I think poor Papa had quite as many!"

"Oh, ho!" thought Sir Horace, "the daughter of a *littérateur;* I like her all the better for that."

He placed a hassock by the fire, and enthroned thereon with a volume of prints the child looked very much at home. He liked her being there, the place seemed to have lost its dulness, she lent happier furnishing to his room. It was so long since any of his were little, it was like a revival of paled pleasure, and his eyes often wandered over to the fire. He had not expected a companion for his lonely evening, still less one of this innocent degree.

Presently she laid down her volume and went over to him.

"Can I not help you?" Asked quietly, looking down upon him still kneeling; and it was with considerable surprise he found her drop upon hands and knees and look up into his grave face for answer. He liked her artlessness, her winsomeness; he was pleased with her readiness to be of use; and very soon Ella was busiest of the two, sorting, piling, numbering, dating, with a quickness and tact surprising as it was pleasing.

And after it was all over Sir Horace recurred to the vexing difficulty of where to place her. He scarcely liked to take liberties with his daughters' apartments, over which they were exceedingly particular; while the guest-chambers would be

very cold and cheerless; but saying, "Carry this light for me, and come upstairs, that we may see if a nest is to be found for you until to-morrow;" he stalked up the broad flight, mailed armour of his ancestors ominous upon its stages. Past grim chambers, splendid and silent, past lofty windows, past diverging corridors, past the more humble section of sleeping rooms; then waste wardrobe rooms, a retreat for a few choice flowers, a chamber where odd pictures and objects of art displaced and out of date were stowed away, and through this a small room, of which Sir Horace alone possessed the right of entrance, a diminutive *sanctum sanctorum*, atelier and study in one: a miniature boudoir where its owner sat at his easel, wrote at his desk, or slept on his couch at will, and always undisturbed —a great boon; whenever it was known Papa was closeted in his compact little retreat nobody ventured an intrusion. He was particular as to privacy at such seasons, and upon his retiring from their world for a little quiet thought alone, his family respected the whim and left him in glorious solitude. And in this fanciful little ante-room he proposed housing his charge with other articles of virtu.

"Well, will it do?" (she was looking around admiringly). "But a doll's house, yet large enough to cradle lost fairies like yourself!"

Blushingly she thanked him with a warmth that made him feel quite young again. She was a little too big to lift to a kiss, but he came down to her rosy beauty.

"Now mind, you are not to sit up all night looking at these pretty things, and don't go to sleep and burn the house down."

She looked up in his face timidly, yet with sweet show of confidence.

"I would rather come down stairs where you are, and sleep upon the rug before the fire."

"Oh, that's it, is it? But you would not wish me to sit up all night to keep the fire in?"

"I thought, perhaps, you might be sitting up late arranging your papers." The tone of voice betrayed her sorrow for the unintentional selfishness.

He noticed it, and said kindly, "So I shall, my child, and if you would rather be downstairs you may do so." Certainly she could nestle with his dog afront the fire.

They went downstairs again after that. It was singular, but the house no longer seemed the lonesome place it was before. He was as cheerful as when his own dear little girls had made all its corners musical.

She was very tired, and it was not long before she was sleeping, head pillowed upon his dog, face turned to the flickering light, ears still catching at the crackling log he had placed on the fire to please her.

The reader will courteously observe there is nothing of the romantic about this episode: a pretty child asleep in the library of one of the most particular of gentlemen, whose five grown-up daughters ought at the outset to preserve him from any suspicion of acting with indiscretion in the matter of thus giving shelter to the homeless; but when to this we add the hedging in of a reputation by a body-guard of thirteen decorous aunts, Sir Horace Vivian's character would seem to be pretty safe.

In addition to which Sir Horace was so applied to literary pursuits, he was not exposed, as are many of his peers, to the assailments of a gay and thoughtless age. Even in Society his circles of acquaintance were grave, sedate, and intellectual, being confined to men who had written, or ought to have written, and those who were going to write, while his mixing with the opposite sex was simply amongst the *bas bleus*.

Now by his acute instincts of propriety being susceptible to the least hint of the irregular, upon reviewing his conduct, so far from feeling quite satisfied therewith, Sir Horace was distinctly ill at ease, even under the shadowing protection of a strong-minded wife, five grown-up daughters, and thirteen scrupulously exact aunts. The circumstance, as it had come about, was both probable and natural, but should any human being get scent of it, there was but little doubt that it would be construed into something both improbable and unnatural; and the Vivian knees knocked one against the other with apprehension as he thought of the dilemma, did any of his

people happen to turn up; and we all know the line of rail mischance runs on.

But the supreme antidote to these unpleasant feelings was afforded by their innocent cause, whose grace and beauty pleaded with stronger eloquence than any self-reasoning. He stood over her, looking down upon the still piece of wax, watching the light flushing the roses and gleaming upon the hair strewn over the glossy blackness of his great dog, and he thought how beautiful she looked; he traced the drooping lashes and delicately pencilled brows, and the general refinement everywhere apparent, and wondered who was her father, her mother, that this should be? To his keen and searching gaze there was displayed more than the mere beauty, he read intellect and understanding, possibly genius might be slumbering there, and he was more than ever interested in his young charge and in her parentage.

Sir Horace returned to the progress of arranging his journals, and for some time was diligently engaged upon the occupation, looking up at intervals with a glance at his dainty volume before the fire. Suddenly he paused, stood perfectly still, and listened: his quick ear had caught the sound of a vehicle in the square; no such unusual occurrence that it should set his heart fluttering thus, but upon this evening his nerves seemed all unstrung. He walked a step towards the window and heard a second vehicle, a third, and at a stride stood behind the curtains, then peered through the hinging crevice of the shutter. The first carriage was close, and the terrible vision met his alarmed gaze of the angular form of Aunt Penelope, where, full in the moonlight, she leaned out of the carriage window, directing the driver to the house; the other vehicles were in the rear of the first, and, with agonized confusion, Sir Horace exclaimed,—

"Good patience, my aunts! All of them! What on earth is to be done?"

He knew it was all of them because one never visited unless in company with the entire thirteen; it was a consolidated body, no single member of which considered it proper to go about this wicked world unattended by as many sisters as had

been providentially provided for the protection of each. And Sir Horace felt his heart sink, for a more disastrous calamity could not have happened.

"Whatever can have brought them here to-night of all nights? How excessively awkward, to be sure! I feel so embarrassed I scarcely like to receive them. But, then, they will hammer at the door until I open it, and thus create a public disturbance and effect an entrance after all; was ever any one so unfortunately situated? If they discover her, it will never be forgotten, and goodness knows what may be made of it! It will cling to me for ever, and after all these years of careful conduct will cast a blot upon the spotlessness of our escutcheon. Bother the woman!"

The somewhat irreverent exclamation being caused by a glimpse of the leader of this corps of amazons descending from her chariot, and turning to assist others of her band to alight.

Farcical as the *contretemps* may appear, to Sir Horace it was a matter of serious moment, and he retreated before the toe of his third aunt, while the two safely alighted formed in line ready for the attack. He took a brief, breathless view of the situation, and decided upon the course to follow instantly. His charge must be concealed!

While there came a tremendous knocking and ringing at the door, Sir Horace lifted the child, and with every care bore her in his arms up the broad steps to that small retreat before mentioned. Quickly as was consistent with comfort, he settled her upon the couch, covered her with warm clothing, lighted the fire in the bijou grate, and left her; locking the door and taking the key, and for double safety that of the larger room by which access was gained to the tiny chamber.

Then he proceeded to admit the bevy.

"How do, nephew? Looking well, I declare! We are very pleased to see you, I am sure! But dreadfully sorry to be so late; break-down on one of the lines—gave us a shocking fright; if we hadn't all been together to keep each other up, I don't know how we should have got through it! And how's Marion?—Not gone to bed?"

"The girls are on the Continent," said Sir Horace, with as much composure as he could call to his aid, wishing the aunts there also.

"Good gracious! You don't say so! And no sheets aired, I'll be bound!"

"I'm afraid not, aunt." The escutcheoned and inhospitable sinner hoped they would go back again to those exciting tracks where break-downs are local and probable.

"Well, we'll soon settle that! Come in, girls! It's fortunate we came; no idea you were alone!"

"Excuse my frankness, aunt, but—the servants have gone home. I intend shutting the place up while Marion is away."

"Nonsense! Do nothing of the kind! Horrid custom, makes the rooms smell musty. Just take my bonnet, Horace, and the reticule—you'll be careful with it, please?"

This interchange of parley was upon the threshold while the force was marshalling, to the dismay of the startled drivers. Aware by old experience the great question of settlement with these men would devolve upon himself, Sir Horace ushered them into the housekeeper's room, and there transacted the delicate business with as little noise as possible; it was a class of person of whom Sir Horace stood in particular dread. When he came forth not an aunt was to be seen. Closing the door upon their charioteers, he went in pursuit, expecting, as he found to be the case, straggling expeditions in various directions. Miss Penelope, the eldest, he caught trying the door of that ante-chamber he had taken the precaution to secure.

"Horace, I smell fire, the door is locked; I am convinced something is amiss!"

"Nothing is amiss, my dear aunt; I am obliged to have a fire now and then in my little studio, or my treasures would suffer."

"I don't think a married gentleman has any business to have treasures locked away in his studio; but you were always of that reserved and mysterious order of mind, nephew. For my part, I excessively dislike anything being kept from family

inspection. Wasn't it the lamented Lord Bacon who said 'Secrecy is corruption'?"

"I do not recall the quotation, but very likely. Where are Aunt Hebe and the rest?"

Voices of the party were heard in the distance; presently they came up with the leader.

"Good gracious, Penelope, the house is deserted! But we found downstairs, it is not so long since, for remains of a supper, with *two* chairs still up to the table, may be seen in the housekeeper's room."

"Confound those chairs!" thought Sir Horace.

"This is very serious!" murmured Aunt Penelope gravely, and with suspicious meaning.

"Collect yourself, my dear aunt, I will explain. Marion with her sisters started for Italy, three of our people gone with them, I gave the others a holiday as the most convenient time. Quite by surprise I had a visitor this evening—I did not trouble to remove the fare to the dining-room, being rather an amateur in the part of Drogan; it was pardoned, and we contented ourselves as you have observed."

"I wish we had come a little earlier, to have seen this interesting friend; but I cannot quite make my mind easy about this fire in the studio."

"We have been in my little sanctum,—"

"And in the library too, I imagine, from the litter! Extravagant, Horace, two fires going at once for one person!"

"Two persons, aunt!" corrected her nephew, waxing irritable under the cross-questioning.

"Yes, two persons, and this other we ought to know something more about, don't you think so, girls? Remember, it is in dear Marion's absence!"

They withdrew upon one side and conferred in a low tone. It may be explained here that the papa of these interesting girls, a classical scholar of marked prejudices, had wedded a lady classical as himself—a veritable Minerva, and it was the fancy of this cultured pair to designate the issue of the union classically; hence the creation of this band of goddesses. They were now left with one common fortune, and that a com-

fortable one, amongst them ; they were all single ladies, but husbanded this fortune by periodically visiting relations and connexions, dividing the entire year upon this colonization and peregrination, moving about in a body, to the intense delight of the people favoured, and the awe-struck wonderment of the several railway companies.

It was a bonded vestal sisterhood : mutual interests making the union compact. Penelope, the eldest, being tacitly acknowledged leader, upon her Amazonian shoulders devolved the execution if not the conception of their travels into far countries ; it was her perfection of genius which first instituted their lengthened visits, by which so large a disbursement was annually saved. The honour of their visit fell without much favouritism upon the round. If told they were not wanted, or that it was not convenient, they stopped the longer, in case they did not get in next time ; their consolidated body gave them strength, and, once located, there was no dislodging them, they were not to be excluded, nor curtailed, nor demolished. Men of their connexion called them the Eleventh Plague, and very much patronized the Club during the visitation. No one bore them in more cordial dislike than did Lady Vivian, whose refined sense of delicacy was terribly shocked by the troop. Upon one occasion, returning from her drive in the Park, she found her house not only taken possession of in her absence, but they were brooding in council over the whole contents of her wardrobe spread out before the tribe.

One quality these ladies possessed which annoyed their friends beyond all their other virtues put together. This was the scenting out of scandals, at the delicate discovery of which they were without rivals in this or any other land. They entertained a theory, not that there was a skeleton in every cupboard, but that there was something wrong going on in every house, which it was their duty to expose. They were a self-appointed court sitting upon the conduct in that traditional castle the Englishman—until their advent—fondly believed his house to be.

CHAPTER XI.

A TESTIMONIAL IS PROPOSED.

Froggypond Hall stood at end of a chase full five minutes' walk from the road. It derived its descriptive title from the legions of frogs that all night long croaked with a vigour mildly resembling the din of a battle. The Mistress of Froggypond was proud of her frogs, and would on no account have had one ensnared. Any visitor objecting to her frogs was requested curtly to withdraw from Froggypond. It is not clear whether the old lady imagined the spirits of her long line of ancestors had passed into these frogs, but it is tolerably certain she considered the frog an ancient and aristocratic emblem. A frog couchant was the crest, a frog in stone squatted upon the family vault, frog salt-cellars in massive silver weighted the board; the old lady had but one surviving relative—her grandson, Elmore, the heir to Froggypond. She had made that gentleman one gift in his life, a scarf-pin, it bore upon its apex a huge gold frog. The beast was the sign-manual of the house. Mrs. Elsynge envied nobody their rooks or their deer, so long as her frogs were alive and croaking.

The pond was at the rear; it was an awful place. At least three of their literary friends had taken it for the scene of horrifying events. Around it grew weeping trees, all the trees that ever wept it seemed; Willow, Poplar, Ash, Elm, Birch, Holly, Lime, Beech, Cherry, and Laburnum; a dense plantation encircling its sluggish sullen depth. It was grown over with noisome weed, it was guarded by weird reeds, it was the haunt of innumerable horrors, it was the great preserve of the frogs of Froggypond.

Did one of the orchestral band find its way into the house, it was raised tenderly by the Mistress (because her servants were afraid of them), and, leaning upon her stick, she would hobble down to her pool (uncommonly like a gentlewoman-witch of olden times), and restore it to its fellows with extravagant care.

Sometimes a dog would set up an agreeable howling in the dead of night, naturally to drown the monotonous croaking from the pond; the old lady would invariably arise upon these occasions and proceed to the scene of disputation; she would not have permitted Cerberus himself to bark her frogs to silence, neither could that canine notable have done so.

"*Qu'en disent les grenouilles?*" was in 1791 the popular Court phrase at Versailles; and truly might it have been the pass-word at the old Hall. The domestics stood in as great awe of the amphibious tribe as did those Lycian shepherds who, Ovid tells us, were changed into frogs for mocking Latona, or as Milton's sonnet hath it,—

> "As when those hinds that were transform'd to frogs
> Rail'd at Latona's twin-born progeny."

But the shepherds, or, as some say, peasants weeding a marsh in Caria, had insulted the tribe, and according to classic precedent but met with their just desert; the servants at Froggypond, on the contrary, paid court timorously to their mistress's favourites.

The county, aware of Mrs. Elsynge's penchant for this department in amphibiology, gave her a wide berth, and with the exception of two or three old families equally peculiar with their hobbies and idiosyncrasies, did not visit. The Mistress, who was strong-minded and obstinate, did not go into mourning on this account; on the contrary, she expressed herself gratified, since their carriages would not disturb her frogs. Nevertheless the estate and lands were considerable, and her grandson was much looked up to.

It was studiously kept from this gentleman, yet somehow came to his knowledge, that Scaborough and Sleperton were united upon the idea of making him a Testimonial.

Why, he could not imagine; and he heartily wished they had honoured somebody else by the choice. True, as Churchwarden, Guardian, Magistrate, and Mayor, he had served the town to the best of his ability, but then he was also the largest landowner for miles round, hence very able to return any mark of esteem the town might confer.

Through the officious informant who is ever at hand to divulge anything particularly kept a secret, Mr. Elsynge was acquainted what preliminaries had taken place; private and confidential meetings having been organized for the arrangements whereby the scheme of municipal gratitude might be carried out with decorum and éclat.

The first meeting had been convened to assemble at eight o'clock in the evening of a Monday, the conference-place being the coffee-room at the *Lindon Arms*. Mrs. Tapper was equal to the occasion; the superb brocade not had out since Tapper's death was worn with buxom effect; the coffee-room, which had not been swept or garnished within memory of man, had undergone a regular turning-out; if there is an interior more faded of aspect and stale of odour than another it is a coffee-room, but this of the *Arms* was made to present a most inviting appearance, and therein assembled a goodly number of influential and representative ones for the discussion of the matter.

Very elaborate had been the propositions and suggestions, and to this gentleman who hated the idea of a Testimonial with emphatic contempt, very elaborate indeed appeared the nonsense.

A week afterwards he heard that a second meeting had been convened, at which had been passed these important resolutions: First, that the Public be invited to respond liberally to the universal sense of the civil, moral, and intellectual worth of Elmore Elsynge, Esquire; a Subscription Fund to be opened at the house of Mr. Alderman Gubbins; Mr. Simcox, Curator of the Museum, being appointed treasurer. Secondly, that the Clergy and Gentry be personally waited upon by one of the Committee in furtherance of their views. Thirdly, that the Testimonial take the form of a Piece of Plate (Mr. Elsynge

being destitute of that useful addendum to the fittings of a gentleman's house! His rooms were lumbered with it already, and there were the frog-graven tankards and goblets, tea-pots and cream-ewers to come). The Third resolution seemed to have been carried after some disputation: Smelt, the Fishmonger, having been of opinion the new memorial of their esteem should take the form of a Stained Glass Window in their church, which could be fixed opposite his (Smelt's) pew, (where there was an ugly blank): but then somebody had the good sense to remark that in that case Smelt himself would be the chief gainer, especially since Mr. Elsynge attended at another church; at which Mr. Smelt, the Fishmonger, left the coffee-room in high dudgeon, and had been heard to remark to Mrs. Tapper at the bar that the arrangements were very unsatisfactory for the general public. After which arose one Uriah Sticky, Grocer, who was a Dissenter, likewise a teetotaler, and who proposed, with mild adjectives, something in the way of a Drinking Fountain or a Pump. He was overruled by the ex-Mayor, who was anything but a temperance advocate, in fact was partial to the vintages: this gentleman testified with pride to the fact that Elmore Elsynge, Esq., detested humbug, and while always foremost for sobriety, was the best customer upon the books of their friend Bacchus Bin who was present: at which Mr. Sticky withdrew much hurt. He was a conscientious reformer, and earnestly wished to see Seaborough and Sleperton depart from the error of their ways; he was affronted by the use of that word "humbug," and went home to Mrs. Sticky, and over an order for lemonade and ginger-beer then being despatched, said, with acute sorrow, that he feared the Testimonial was being altogether mismanaged. Upon the retirement of their dear friend Sticky it was further discussed. Bacchus Bin, the Wine Merchant, said he was not going to subscribe to anything in the Drinking-Fountain way; the English as a race were deteriorating, and he attributed it to the increase in water-drinking, which he thought impoverished the blood. The respected gentleman (who ranks next in importance in the neighbourhood to Cask and Cooper, the well-known

Brewers), was listened to with deep attention and many an appreciative glance upward at a framed announcement in silver letters that Cask and Cooper's Entire and Fine Old Ales might there be obtained. "I have to propose, gentlemen, that this Testimonial to our highly respected landlord, who we trust may some day represent this important and enlightened Borough in Parliament; that this Testimonial which we are about unanimously to present to our much-esteemed landlord, who we hope yet to see represent our Town and Borough; that this Testimonial which it is the general wish of the residents of this enlightened Borough—" here some bold individual cried "Hear! hear!" which put Mr. Bin out, and he sat down amid much esteem and respect, without, however, having advanced the Testimonial very much farther. Mr. Vault, the Stonemason, here trespassed, as he said, upon the time of the meeting, but with deference to the better opinion of those with more experienced judgment, he ventured courteously to submit a proposition for something in the way of an Obelisk.

This proposal was not received favourably, and the gentleman, with much solemnity, descended to his seat again. Another unfortunate being begged to suggest the foundation of Almshouses as a memorial to the goodness of their friend, whose virtues they had assembled to celebrate; in spite of speaking very nicely, and a most polite bow at commencement and close of his remarks, the gentleman was extinguished. It was known he had a group of aged relatives in the background, and the Committee did not see it. After that Mr. Buckram, the Draper, rose with very business-like demeanour, and he would not detain the meeting by any roundabout statement of his views upon this important, nay, he might say, momentous occasion. He knew that the time of the Committee was taken up by much that was irrelevant, and would not introduce foreign matter in his brief remarks at that time. He had felt surprised at the manner in which the subject had been treated; he might say, indeed, it had been a discussion upon trivialities, and he begged to amend the motion of submitting, in the most concise manner possible, the proposition to

be made. People here appearing bewildered, and not quite certain himself, where he was, the generally esteemed speaker made a butt at his proposal, and suggested a yard of very good Silk or Satin Illuminated by hand, &c. This was overruled in consequence of its not being deemed suitable when put to the vote, the truth of the negative sentiment being that but one person in all Seaborough or Sleperton was skilled at illuminating, that person being the daughter of Benjamin Buckram, Draper and Hosier. After that Mr. Easel, the Artist, a great authority in matters of taste, submitted that an Oil Painting, full length, in robes of office; which, said the authority in matters of taste, would not only be a work of art, but would be historically valuable and an heir-loom, should be presented, he thought, to that exemplary lady Mrs. Elsynge, of Froggypond. At this point Mr. Panel, the Carriage-builder, had lifted his hand apologetically, and wished to pass a remark. Mr. Panel was a man of substance, and the remark was listened to kindly.

"Mr. Chairman and Fellow-townsmen," commenced the courtly Panel, "we assemble to-day upon an occasion that is, to my mind, of more than ordinary interest. For a long period we have been silent but not unmoved witnesses of the virtues of a descendant of one of the oldest and most honoured families in this neighbourhood. The time has come to make this appreciation public: in the face of the world we would bear evidence to the official and private service rendered to this Town and Borough by the illustrious gentleman we would signalize; and I submit, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, that the Testimonial take the form of a new and handsome Carriage." The lumbering old affair then in use by the family had been made by Panel's father, and the proposal was attentively considered; it was eventually thrown out, upon the representation being made that Mr. Elsynge seldom or never used the family coach, he being, as was well known, an enthusiastic lover of equine exercise, and possessing, moreover, faultless animals in the stables. He was a great hunter, and they were proud of it—it was a hunting country. Mr. Silverside arose; Mr. Silverside represented the wealth of the community of shopkeepers. Mr. Silverside said he had reserved his remarks until the last,

reserved them with impatience, for he had listened to a great deal of nonsense, and most of the sentiments had been all fudge! Those who had distinguished themselves became surly, but with knit brows and crisp-looking silver curls sloping upward from an intellectual brow, the much-respected fellow-townsman pursued the tenour of his way. It was this way: he had lived all his life in their beautiful town, had seen two generations, had assisted in the presentation of Testimonials before, and disliked circumlocution. All things considered, he thought, and he thought the Committee would think as he thought, in thinking which he thought he was thinking with the Committee. Here the worthy Silverside, whom Nature had not engraved as an orator, shut his eyes the better to see his argument, and the gentlemen who had already spoken and been called to account applauded with their toes under the table, the Jeweller going on to say he thought, and he thought the Committee would think as he thought in thinking, A Piece of Plate, commemorative of the Trophies of the Chase, would be as acceptable as any thing they could confer; and there being no dissentient voice, this was unanimously carried, and the worthy proposer entrusted with the commission of its execution, in as tasteful a design and as rich a quality as the subscribed amount would admit of.

Mr. Elsynge's informant entered very fully into this account, and the possessor of the many virtues would gladly have handed over a hundred pounds to the local charities to escape from the coming honour. It was eminently repulsive being under an obligation to nobody knows whom, for a something he did not deserve, and would rather have been without, and yet was supposed to know nothing about. To feel every eye was contemplating his horsemanship while calculation was going on with hand in pocket, concerning the cost of Self and Steed in Silver! To feel unable to speak his mind to the traders or the servants, lest he should hurt the susceptibility of one or other contributing to that precious Testimonial!

It was very unpleasant, and Mr. Elsynge did not like it at all, and rode over to commune with the Mistress of Froggy-pond Hall.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE TRIUMPH OF SEASONS."

DECEMBER: Lady Darrell's residence in Brighton: The apartment it was her pleasure to occupy when alone: Evening.

A chamber characteristic as usual, presenting an unconventional arrangement of colour, and grouping for effect.

The first impression left upon the mind was similar to that caused by some dense forest, some nook o'er-arched and embowered by solid masses of dusky leaf, save that here no relief of gorgeous browns, of tawny fern, of auburn boughs was admitted: the wonders here of hue and tone came of the cunning blending of this forest-colour in its gradation of changing shades.

The ceiling was picked out in a tracery of delicate leaves, between which, at intervals, the blue or white afforded contrast as in the woods. The walls were trellised with tropical creepers of rich and lustrous leaf, but no blossom. The floor was laid, apparently, with thick layers of moss. So much for the frame-work. The singularity of the interior depended upon the appointments, of a magnificent character and very original. From a ring of gold central of the ceiling there fell thick curtains of velvet of an olive hue, the ends of these were confined by gold pegs at either corner of the room, and formed a canopied tent of Arab resemblance, lined within with silk. From the centre of this elegant tent descended by a chain of gold a ruby-coloured lamp; upon the floor over luxurious cushions were stretched dazzling white rugs, and hereon my lady reclined at her ease, reading. A slender tapering gilt pedestal bore a rustic basket of vivid ferns; also near to her, beneath the

canopy, was an elegant jardinière graceful with drooping palms. The spacious apartment being square, there would naturally from arrangement of the curtains be four semi-oval spaces upon the mossy carpet. These had been fitted with tropical plants in a style of as admirable disorder as might have been presented in their original fastnesses; a skilled artist of the Gardens of Acclimatisation, in the Bois de Boulogne, had been entrusted with the delicate commission of pleasing her ladyship in the tropical decorating of these glens; he did not please her, no one ever did, but she made fain to be content because anxious to take possession: nevertheless that artist had produced four conceptions of chaste and beautiful design, representing the Seasons in African valleys with their marvellous gradation of growth and colour. Midst of the luxuriance of verdure upon each side was a statue allegorical of the Season: suspended above by chains of gold were ruby lamps, one over each retreat; birds flitted through interlaced leaves, fountains curved their spiral spray, the odorous breath of exquisite perfume filled all the chamber; and before each of the retreats was spread a magnificent tiger-skin,—Lady Helen would have been unable to exist without her jungle trophies.

No furniture—four-legged monstrosities as she considered such; no books, save one she was reading with fascinated attention; no pictures, save those of Nature herself; no intrusion by domestics or others. The seclusion here was inviolate, here alone she retired to be free and solitary as though in reality amidst the forest ways beneath the sumptuous awning of some barbaric Chief.

Lord Darrell, her ladyship's father, once made a mistake with the doors in this new house, and glided upon this strange world, but with a scared look he glided out again and had never ventured there since. And no other step had profaned its solitude. It was absolutely the bijou dominion of its haughty sovereign.

A warm and luxurious temperature was promoted by pipes concealed behind the rock-work and plants; thus, although December, it was the climate here of some sunny land.

"Not at the outside of this volume did her ladyship gaze, it was not this caused the proudly curved lips to smile."—Vol. II. Page 163.

Lady Helen was robed simply, yet in character with the retirement of this spot. An evening dressing-gown of white cashmere lined with ruby-coloured silk, her long hair unconfined straying over this and the snowy rugs upon which she reclined. Her hand trifled with a small volume bound in a costly fashion, the covers chastely embellished with gold upon a blue ground of exquisite shading. Not at the outside of this volume did her ladyship gaze, it was not this caused the proudly curved lips to smile. The volume was the Minister's latest work, and it happened to hit her ladyship's taste.

The time given to its perusal was the pleasantest she had passed for many a day; the book fell from Lady Helen's hand, and lay with its sumptuous binding upon the snowy rug.

"He closes with coldness and sarcasm," she murmured sadly, "as though the woman with her children spared to her can afford to think of old attachment or present emotion. This man does not know human nature, or the womanly side of it."

Resting her head upon her hand, for a wonder this haughty Empress seemed strangely human for a while; she was musing upon this writer of whom the world was talking.

"I cannot understand it," said her ladyship slowly, "the man and his eloquence in the pulpit move me beyond control, but I am unable to reconcile these side-gleams of bitterness, half rebellious, almost repining, and evidencing either keen regret or a horrible longing; there is some mystery, and, contrary to my inclinations, I am interested. I must admit to myself that I like the man: it is excessively disagreeable going with the rabble who follow him, but I like the man! I wish I knew his history! My wishes have hitherto been law; why does he not do as others do, and seek my friendship? The friendship I have never yielded to another I would give to him; and surely I am worthy of his confidence! That which he may never have told to another he perhaps would tell to me. I do not know why, but the suspicion has flitted across my mind that he has been married—is separated from his wife, possibly from his children. Oh, if this be the case, how yearningly could I listen, and confess! What joy and relief to disclose all, and at last meet with a little sympathy!

I, who have never known it, never experienced woman's great source of solace—the power to confide to some compassionate friend the full sorrow of an overburdened heart! I am told he does not visit the wealthy, but devotes his entire time to the poor, the troubled, the sin-stricken, and crime-stained; then why does he not call here? There would be nothing ceremonious about such a visit, we are not strangers, and by language of the eye are well known to one another; knit by some great, and if I err not, by one similar sorrow."

Her favourite and privileged maid entered.

"Mr. Garland, my lady, presents his compliments, and if you are at leisure—"

"Show Mr. Garland here at once!"

"My lady?—" This was so startling an innovation, for a visitor to be conducted to this apartment, where the faithful servitors could neither peep nor listen, that my lady's lady resented it with as well-bred an air of remonstrance as she deemed politic. With languid hauteur the lady bestowed one inquiring glance upon the maid; it was sufficient.

Mr. Garland had been conducted by the footman to the state drawing-room. Upon a fawn-coloured leather sofa was curled a reddish, fawn-coloured individual, who just raised his head with the fox-like scrutiny habitual, and curled up again, motionless, silent, part and parcel of the tawny couch. This was not according to the Minister's large-hearted ideas at all; he disapproved of the wholesale ignoring of the poor old lord, and, walking up, offered him his hand with genuine feeling, and that cordially winning air so ingratiating with every one. Lord Darrell took the hand, gingerly, and, having taken it, not knowing what to do with the unusual offering, dropped it, and curled closer, with a half-nervous look out of the corners of his eyes through fringes of red lashes. His lordship entertained distaste and want of appreciation for public men. Ministers he did not understand, platform orators he abominated (he had once been cajoled into the chair at the back of an awful orator before a crowded and noisy meeting, and Lord Darrell had never forgotten the peculiar sensations attending that embarrassing evening). Writers, too, he disliked ex-

tremely; thus when Mr. Garland uttered his kindly greeting the nobleman merely nodded, turned round, and curled up tighter on the other side. Mr. Garland walked away to another part of the room, and stood before a painting representing an old and stately building surrounded by beautiful scenery.

"A noble building this, my lord! Some historic site?"

"Our place at the Lakes; beautifully retired. I was born for quietude." He had glided up, and standing by the wall blended in with the brown scrolling of the paper.

"I wish you would call upon me!" said the Minister, earnestly, "I should like to hear all about this house."

"Would you, really?"

A smile changed the whole of his features; he looked gratefully at this man taking the trouble to be polite to him.

"Believe me, I should be most pleased. Come whenever disposed to enjoy a quiet talk, and without any ceremony."

With a grateful expression the old lord glided back to his lair, and became inanimate, just as the domestic whose province it was to announce the Darrell guests opened the door. The servants made sport of the autumnal Peer. He knew it, shrank under it, but passed it over sufferingly, passive and as though serenely unconscious of any and everything.

"Her ladyship will be pleased to see you, sir, if you will follow me." And the visitor was transferred to her ladyship's maid, who conducted him to her ladyship's presence.

Mr. Garland was considerably astonished when he entered the tropical fastness. There was luxuriance of flora, a romantic circlet of splendid growth arranged as he had never seen in a building, and the silken canopied tent, which he skirted while he heard the clear musical voice of Lady Helen saying,—

"Come round, Mr. Garland. You will think this a barbaric place to receive you in, but I retreat to my little winter garden to escape from people, and I have but just finished reading your book, which, it seems to me, should be enjoyed in some such privacy. It is kind to call upon me: I know how you are engaged, and appreciate your visit accordingly!"

This was a particularly gracious speech for her ladyship, and while the Minister lightly touched her hand, extended

without rising, he experienced pleasure at meeting with a more genuine reception than he had anticipated. She waved her hand toward a folding chair with three gilt supports, and he seated himself. He caught sight of his TRIUMPH OF SEASONS, and of course noticed that it was bound in a style specially luxurious and artistic.

"You have been reading my little book?"

"Yes! And it pleases me in parts; but you are rather bitter between the lines, and you do not know our sex."

"Possibly it is one of the departments of knowledge best unknown. But are you sure?"

"Quite, if you suppose a woman with her children spared to her will not think of them in every instance first."

He inclined his head with gentle assent.

"I have now called to ask sympathy for one of your sex who is in trouble, and passing through great anxiety."

"But what could have made you come to me, of all Brighton, when there are so many sympathetic souls about?"

"Because," he replied very softly, "I do not know any lady whose sympathy lies more deep than yours; who has suffered more within a lifetime; whose intense compassion would be as surely excited.

"Forgive me," she said, giving him her hand again, as she had not given her hand to any one for many a day, "for my doubt of your knowledge."

He proceeded gravely, and as though feeling very much the burden of his mission.

"I do not know any one to whom I would go as I have come to you, bearing the heart's sorrow of another woman; to ask you to go to her and offer the comfort more acceptable when tendered sincerely by one of her own sex."

"Who is it?" she inquired faintly. "And what is the source of her trouble?"

"Lady Ellerby, a very young wife: you know them; her husband has been away from Brighton for more than a seemly period; the gossips have been teasing her about it, and she is sadly distressed, and timorous of confiding her sorrow to any, which makes it harder to bear."

"And she admitted this to you?"

"No, I taxed her with it; I discerned the trouble, and wish to help her. I know his lordship, and do not fear; but it is not so easy to impress her with my conviction of his truth and faith, now that the poison is working its course. A woman sooner takes the word of a woman as security for a man's honour, than that of one of his own sex. Will you go to her, explain that Lord Ellerby's artist fancies may be idyllic, and express yourself confident of his allegiance?"

"No, Mr. Garland, because I am not confident. I could speak thus assuredly of but one man,—but one!"

The tone was very pathetic, and her eyes filled with tears.

The Minister was moved; he bowed his head.

"You allude to—"

"To the dead! But now," with an effort, recovering herself, "how can I help this poor child? What do you suggest?"

"Man cannot suggest; God will prompt. Go to her pityingly; there will be more consolation in mute sympathy and cheering words than in a studied effort to console."

"I will do as you ask me." She paused, trifling painfully with the fur by her side. "Lady Ellerby is not the only woman who needs sympathy, and cannot confide her sorrow to another."

"My whole life's experience teaches me differently; but you, of course, are alluding to—to Lady Lindon?"

"Ay, to that unhappy lady, widowed and childless! Can there be a greater demand for sympathy than hers?"

"Oh, yes, very readily; Lady Lindon's whole life is to me an inconceivable riddle, vexing and unsatisfactory; a masked continuance of anguish, a hollow dedication of self and soul to the world, an endless battle with opinion, a tourney of unapproached daring with Society, a miserable isolation betwixt gaiety and selfishness, a comfortless and uncomforted passage through a world bristling with weapons, a wealthy solitude, an infinite dreariness, a repining for ever and for ever, while haunted by what might have been, and confronted by what is. Lady Lindon is worthy of a more noble destiny than this, and while supporting such unjust

and agonizing theories, Lady Lindon has not the prior claim to heart-felt sympathy. But I am well assured the method you adopt, and the forms you accept of disguising remorse and veiling contrition, are but of valueless regard in your more than womanly keenness of judgment."

"Would you have me sit and brood, nunlike, in some close cell, on barren joys, and languish under yearning never to be realized?"

"No, I do not hold with brooding, although God knows we cannot help it at times. I would have you seek out the sorrows of others, therein to lose partial memory of your own!"

"Mine are too great to be lost sight of in that way; I should but increase their weight and burden."

"I would have you visit the sick; minister to the poor!"

"I detest sickness in myself or any one else, in the poor especially; if my relief is to be worked out in such channels, I would rather keep my own sorrows and woes to myself, and leave others to do the same."

He took no notice of her plain candour, and would not, until his scroll of good works was fully unrolled.

"Then I would have you seek humbly, and with most utter penitence, for some higher hope than spans this little world of ours; aspire to the peace more abiding than earth affords."

"The first step to that peace, and the glimpse of that higher hope must be when the treasures of which a heart has been despoiled live in that heart again, live for that heart alone. Can you restore the dead to life, Westley Garland, or the lost to the guilty and suffering? When you can do this, then talk to me as though I were one of the ordinary human women to whom you would carry hope."

"There is One who can do all things," he replied, with a sad and gentle smile, "restore the dead to the loving, the lost to the guilty. But before Mercy works the miracle Pardon must assign the motive, the sacrifice of many tears and the offering of a heart's true penitence will effect all you desire, and the rest you may safely leave in Other hands."

Long after the Minister's departure, Lady Lindon thought upon his words.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIBUNAL OF GODDESSES.

THE conference was of short duration. Miss Penelope turned curtly to her nephew.

"We are decided. We shall stop, and must rough it. Don't you trouble, Horace, we'll do! Now, girls, to work! Where's the plate-basket, nephew?"

"I'm sure I can't say, aunt!"

"Good lawk!" cried Aunt Phyllis spitefully, "Here's a man don't know where his own plate-basket is! It's a good thing we came as we did to tell him! I always said this was the most extravagant household in England!"

"I've a suspicion all is not right!" whispered Aunt Penelope to Aunt Minerva, "and if I live, I'll find out what it is! We owe it to Society, dears; our painful duty lies before us. I am seldom deceived in my presentiments, the true danger-signals of life. Mark dear Horace's flushed cheek and absent manner, and his edging near that door! I always had my suspicions about Horace, and one day you will see I am right. Our poor sainted Marion" (Lady Vivian) "would not absent herself without a cause."

"Pulmonary, dear Penelope, the doctors say!"

"Fudge!"

"Shall we go downstairs to the library, my dear aunts? You'll excuse the drawing-room—no fire—furniture covered up."

"Don't you trouble, Horace; we'll soon have the covers off!"

"Hoity-toity, what's this?" Aunt Diana had picked up a small pocket-handkerchief which the little fugitive had

unfortunately dropped upon the stairs. "Well, this is pretty, I must confess! Marked—yes, it is, with *E. T.* in the corner! This does not belong to any of us you know."

"Give me the thing!" Thus the presiding goddess, in a sepulchral voice; and the sister harpies made obeisance.

"Tell you what it is," said Aunt Penelope, in solemn undertones, "a female is concealed in the house!" A shuddering thrill pervaded the closely clustered maidens, and the more sensitive to the unkind breath of calumny held each other by the hand, looking unutterably pensive. Not so the hardened leader, an old officer, who never gave way to sentiment, or anything soft. Looking the group hard in the face, she repeated, "a female!" and from the horrified looks one would have supposed they had never seen a female before. "And it is our bounden duty to discover her! But come, girls, there are seven beds to be aired; we shall not be a-bed by morning! Now Horace, where's the key of the clothes-press?"

"I rather think Marion took it with her!"

"Then I rather think we shall have to force the lock! Don't you trouble, Horace, but trot down to your books."

"I wish I knew where to lay my hand on a fellow who understands dynamite, to despatch this lot to the other end of London!" With which undutiful, disrespectful, and irreverent vent to his inner sensations; Sir Horace then relieved himself outwardly: "There seems to be some dissatisfaction, my dear aunts, at your finding me so very much monarch of all I survey. You'll allow me to say, with all my love for you, that I have not the least objection to continue my independent sovereignty. Your fly-men have not left the square, and I shall be happy to re-engage them for you."

"Just what I expected," remarked Aunt Penelope to Aunts Hermione and Vesta; "he wants to get rid of us; but he shan't! No, Horace, we've come for a month, and a month we stop, if only in the interests of dear Marion, and though all the Guards of St. James's should attempt to eject us! So don't you trouble, Horace, we'll manage, and get things into working order; but no mysteries, we're determined!"

"Well said!" from Aunt Vesta, the others piping in unison.

Knowing of old experience that remonstrance would be futile, Sir Horace left the goddesses to luxuriate at will, and returned to his task in the library. Occasionally the marching of the force from quarter to quarter caused a rumbling to be heard, and sometimes, when they were disagreeing and all talking at once, the din of the fray floated down to him; but beyond this he was not much annoyed for the time being. At an early hour in the morning they retired; the house was perfectly still, and before the embers of his fire Sir Horace reviewed the situation. He knew sufficient of the battalion to rest assured that they would leave no stone unturned likely to forward their investigation.

He longed to revisit his little charge, to make certain all was well with her; it would be the only time, he feared, when he could go secure from interruption.

Having stocked a basket with provisions and all the good things he could find, Sir Horace extinguished the light, and stole softly up stairs. It was early dawn, a shaft of light fell on the mailed figures guarding the stairs like the appointed sentinels of propriety. Past these it was very dark, and he had to feel quietly for the door-knob; thus doing, his hand encountered something soft and warm; it was a human neck, and it reared. He knew it was Aunt Penelope, who had been listening at the key-hole. The basket grazing her arm, the idea of a burglar and plate-basket evidently took possession of the fair detective, for she fled like the wind, to the great delight of Sir Horace, that persevering gentleman admitting himself without loss of time, and carefully closing the door.

In the second chamber he found the fire burning low, casting flickering shadows on the pretty sleeper, who formed a subject he designed for an early sketch. It was so near the dawn, he made up the fire, settled himself in an easy-chair, and watched her, it was far too fair a picture to disturb. The delicate contour, healthful flush, and youthful happiness of that dream-time made up a study that delighted him, and before he was aware of his weariness, he too fell asleep; and slept on till daylight, to be awakened by two lips on his that left

the swiftest and lightest of kisses. It was the more pleasant because it released him from the thraldom of unpleasant dreaming, wherein, arraigned before the thirteen as counsel and judges in a court with closed doors, he had been subjected to cross-examination of a peculiarly offensive kind.

"So, miss," said he smilingly, "you are awake, then?"

"I've had a lovely sleep," she answered, with charming confidence, "and been dreaming of poor Papa."

"And I've been dreaming too!" replied he, with a wry face. "A pretty pickle you've got me into! And how to get out of it is more than I can discern. You open your eyes, little one! Frankly the entire family according to Burke, has descended; you don't understand; come here and I will explain." He lifted her on to his knee and explained; she was delightfully sensible, but caught at the humour rather than the seriousness of the position.

"I can creep downstairs and away if you like."

"Not for anything! They are all over the place. One on guard at every door, a posse at the bottom of the stairs, and two marching up and down the court-yard."

This was exaggeration, but it served to impress her, and she looked with grave concern into the kind face, while saying,—

"I am so sorry! I ought not to have stayed."

"I suppose not, but we both acted for the best. Don't go near that window, and tread lightly when moving about, for they've wonderful ears. I must leave you now, for I want to get down to the library before any of them are about."

She gave him her hand prettily, and with a Good-bye kiss he took leave. All was silent, and he was cautiously locking the outward door and congratulating himself, when he heard Aunt Penelope say at the foot of the stairs,—

"Just wait and hear what he has to say in explanation."

At the foot of the stairs the gorgons were drawn up in line.

"Horace!" cried Aunt Penelope, transfixing him with her accusing eye, "your bed was not slept in last night."

"Good patience; no more it was!" he exclaimed, for the first time alive to the ugly fact. "I—er, the bed was—er—it was so late, I mean early, I really didn't think it worth while."

"Slept in your chamber of mystery perhaps?" And the speaker looked volumes, to the intense disgust of her sensitive nephew, who, considerably nettled, replied,—

"No, my dear aunt! I am like many another monarch, the state couch is only used upon state occasions."

"This levity is shocking!"

"Disgraceful!" murmured Aunt Dido.

The others spake not, but thought the more.

"It may not perhaps be known to you that an old sportsman is satisfied with the veriest shake-down."

"Girls!" Aunt Penelope addressed the assemblage. "When have we ever shrunk from doing our duty? Do we shrink now? If dear Horace has down to be shaken, it is our duty to shake it. Have we come all this way to be consistent and womanly, or have we not? Girls, I wait your decision."

"Suppose we discuss it over coffee?" said Sir Horace.

"We had that hours ago; it's luncheon time now; there's nothing in the house, and nobody to send to Gunter's!"

"Suppose I go and order—"

"No, thank you, we'll go together, and afterwards you will take us to the German Reeds, and then we've a little shopping, and as dear Dido longs to see a skating-rink, we'll finish there."

Utterly aghast, the unfortunate Sir Horace, passing through it all in imagination, began to feel dreadfully unwell. He was at a loss to conceive which would be the most terrible experience—the luncheon, the entertainment, the business, or the exercise, in the latter, by the way, he devoutly prayed the party would not attempt to take part.

"I hope you will excuse me—I—really—some writing, must be done—pressed for time!"

"Nonsense! We don't come to see you every day; give the time up to us now we're here, you'd never be so ungallant as to leave us to ourselves! Fancy us at the crossings, Horace! We want you to take care of us, we might be run over!"

"Certainly, my dear aunts," assented Sir Horace, profoundly impressed, but thinking "No such luck, I'm afraid!"

In process of time the Aunts-extraordinary were arrayed,

and the party set forth. Sir Horace did not quite know whether to put himself at the head or the tail of the detachment, but the ladies settled it, and made sure of their knight-errant by keeping him well in the centre. Altogether it was a spectacle, and thus London seemed to consider, for its worthy citizens stared aghast at Sir Horace, fancying he was the head keeper of St. Luke's. Never having tried the sensation of riding in hansom cabs, his charges decided upon that mode of transit, and an entire rank was chartered forthwith. They journeyed in a line to the German Reeds' entertainment, to the wonderment of passing artisans, who asked one another were they delegates from some Reform movement, or Almshouses going to a treat. Still in the centre of the procession Sir Horace felt his position acutely; the illiterate evidently expected he would bow, or in some other way acknowledge the open-mouthed and awe-struck interest, but the gentleman did nothing of the kind; he was thinking of the child alone in that great house, and felt anxious concerning her. Arrived at their destination, the commissionaire also supposed it a Charity out for the day; he was abrupt, and careful that his uniform did not fraternize with decayed gentlewomen. They entered: as usual, Sir Horace taking front seats for the assembly. The audience was applauding as they entered, and Aunt Penelope bowed, to the great amusement of some quiet folk near the door. When the tickets were obtained, it was the leader's custom to push forward and leave Sir Horace struggling in the rear. She now led her flock after the manner of geese on a common, with their nephew at the rear; he did not repine, remembering that even the tail of a comet is lustrous. The leader could not find fourteen vacant seats, but she officiously requested a young lady and gentleman to remove; this they did, looking very frightened, and the batch of Amazons took victorious possession. But then it was discovered that Aunt Hermione had left her tippet in one of the cabs, and nothing would do but the entire party must go out again.

The entertainment having commenced, people felt and looked very annoyed, noticing which, Miss Penelope glared upon

them so ferociously, and was backed by so formidable a contingent, people made room with the best grace they could summon. Outside it was discovered that the line of cabs had disappeared, and, highly incensed, the party returned to the hall. As they passed the men all looked down in their hats, a profound sensation was aroused, and Sir Horace wished himself at the bottom of the Red Sea. They had not been sitting seven minutes before Aunt Dido wished for some refreshment. Sir Horace was required to oblige, and he did so, not daring to glance to right or left while making his way out.

Here, an idea flashed upon him, a bold one, but which he proceeded to put into execution. He would return home—like the wind—see how his charge was faring, and return as breathlessly; in a few hurried words he would explain events to the child, so that her fear or anxiety would be dispelled.

The cab he hired bore him along by quiet streets and saving corners, and in a very few minutes after leaving the hall he was with Ella, who was not looking any the worse for her imprisonment. The child greeted her friend with gladness, and heard the explanation, thanking him sweetly for his efforts in her behalf; so sweetly he felt more than repaid. He was enabled to give her a few minutes' liberty for a race about the place while restocking the provision-basket; and replenishing the coals and wood and picture-books.

He was just re-entering the cab when two policemen appeared, and, checking the driver, inquired of his fare if he answered to the name of Sir Horace Vivian. Sir Horace, with guilty quaking, felt something had happened. He assured the officers, with much politeness, he fully answered to the name, begging to be informed of the motive of their interest.

The officer, who chanced to be one of the obtuse sort, and failed to perceive the gentleman's agitation, blurted out,—

"Quantity of ladies gone into hysterics at the Circus crossing, calling out for you, sir!"

At first Sir Horace thought of regaining his dwelling and leaving them at the Circus crossing, but he well knew it would make the inevitable retribution more terrible.

Whatever had transpired, all was orderly at that point when the troubled gentleman arrived upon the scene. Inquiring of another policeman, he was told that the ladies had been taken to the opposite refreshment-rooms, and, hastening thither, Sir Horace discovered his aggrieved aunts, not lying outstretched, awaiting medical restoratives, as he anticipated; but sitting in a line, sipping cherry-brandy, for which an attendant brought a bill to Sir Horace, total twenty-six shillings. And still Miss Penelope looked with bitter displeasure upon her nephew.

"We will not allude here to your conduct, Horace, for one who could thus leave us to perish must be impervious to any reprimand that affection or morality might devise. It is evident by the success attending the faithful officers in their search for you, that, prompted by some inscrutable and mysterious purpose, you returned home; it confirms our previous terrible suspicions, and, Horace, we tremble for you. In the name of your long-suffering family, we conjure you to account for this ominous action!"

"Certainly, my dear aunts! But why all this emotion? Allow me to explain. Aunt Dido wanted something to eat—"

"There is no necessity for putting it in that brutal form, Horace!" cried Aunt Dido indignantly; "but go on!"

"Aware of the delicacy of my dear aunt's appetite" (it resembled that of an ostrich), "I would not venture upon procuring the confectionery of the neighbourhood." Saying which, he removed from his pocket a miscellany of tartlets which the ladies had been busy manufacturing all the morning, and which had been discovered by the uncaged birdie. Much chagrined, the ladies accepted the explanation for the time being, but resolved the affair should receive some other solution.

"If you are now well enough, I propose we go home!"

"Oh, certainly, having spoilt our day's enjoyment, you would drag us back without so much as looking at the shops! No, Horace, we have come to do an hour or two's shopping, and we'll do it, if never again! We are all wanting new dresses, and mantles, and bonnets, and may as well have the

benefit of your taste as not! Artists, as a rule, are famed for the excellence of their taste, especially those with private studios! So don't you trouble, Horace, we'll do, once set us down at the counter!"

Sir Horace was not by any means a penurious person, but he shivered slightly upon hearing this, and felt if he had brought his cheque-book.

Coerced into a large Drapery establishment, Sir Horace stood behind a costume-stand hidden from the view of an imposing-looking gentleman, who, with large assurance remarking to an auxiliary, "A rush, I think!" courteously inquired Miss Penelope's pleasure. When it was discovered to be a party, the gentleman fell through a trap, or disappeared in some other mysterious form, and was no more seen in that part of the building. The thirteen ladies were patiently entertained by thirteen sleek assistants, who rapidly crowded the counter with fabric in all colours of the rainbow and every quality of the market. His aunts' faces were glowing with pleasure, and Sir Horace thought it a capital chance for a quiet stroll; but no, Aunt Penelope's argus eye was all about her, and with a shrill cry she arrested his retreat.

"Come back, Horace! What, you're off again, then?"

Being a sensitive man, this was peculiarly offensive to Sir Horace before the tittering employés; he felt that he was taken for the Mormon President of Salt Lake, and having an aversion to notoriety, he looked around for the friendly shadow of another costume-stand, but none being at hand, he seated himself, and studied the green tracery of the carpet, whereon the goddesses fenced him about.

After a time that counter presented a fair conception of chaos, when each of the ladies had plucked at the inside of every piece, unrolled every roll, turned over every pile, and generally played the deuce with the merchandise, to the consternation of the assistants and marked impatience of their superiors. The utmost resources of the warehouses were taxed to win favour of these singular customers, but no sooner did any of them appear upon the eve of deciding but

the others had some objection to offer. Thus no progress was made, and Sir Horace was waxing feverish when Miss Penelope thought she would look in the window; she might see something there, she liked better. With much dignity the leader proceeded to the pavement, followed by Aunt Hebe and Aunt Minerva. Then came Aunt Hermione, Aunt Vesta, and Aunt Circe, none of whom had been quite able to decide. Then Aunts Thetis and Leda walked slowly out, talking in a low, deep tone. Aunt Dido trotted in the rear, she had inhaled fumes of cookery from the nether regions, and it revived allayed reminiscences of the charms of Regent Street and Oxford Street Restaurants. Aunts Phyllis and Diana reared in turn and joined the throng, taking Iphigenia with them. Left desolate, Miss Evadne caught at Sir Horace's arm, and clinging thereto with frantic and affrighted perseverance, she was borne from the shop by her devoted nephew.

"Now, Horace," said Miss Penelope, when the grave assembly was met before the elaborately-arranged windows, "oblige us by going in and telling 'em we think their goods very dear, and we can do better, and see more variety in the country!"

Poor Sir Horace was anything but enraptured with this commission.

Standing above the savoury kitchen of the establishment, Aunt Dido emphatically declared she *must* take something, or sink. The chevalier Sir Horace fervently wished she might sink, or else that her head might tumble off and down to the charger of the cook. A stampede ensued in favour of a Restaurant, where his cormorant of an aunt was soon satisfied.

Future operations were then considered; and it being decided the bonnets would most interest them, the party proceeded to a large and imposing Millinery establishment. The greater part of two hours was passed here. The natural objection of the ladies to any style too fashionable, any style not fashionable enough, any colours not in exact accord with their individual taste, the fitting on by the entire thirteen when any particular design was approved, the trying of harmonious blending of shades before every mirror

in the shop, the unpicking and readjusting, taking out of flowers, and taking off of bows, and adding of fresh ones; the altering of plumes and cunning placing of ornaments, the substitution of black for white lace, or *vice-versâ*, and the removal of narrow for broad, and of plain for corded ribbons, —all this occupied much time and exhausted the ingenuity and patience of the combined English and French talent of the fashionable establishment; and great was the wrath thereof when Miss Penelope solemnly asserted their regret, but they really did not see anything that quite suited them. And they walked out with some indignation that these artistes should have taken up so much of their time, and have shown them nothing superior to what they saw daily in the country. The principal looked highly outraged, was heard to mutter something about a tribe of locusts, and proceeded to an inner room, where she discharged a poor girl, the sole support of bedridden parents.

After such fatigue, Aunt Dido wanted something to eat.

"Now, Horace," said Aunt Penelope, when Aunt Dido had again refreshed herself, "you shall take us to see a Skating-rink, of which we hear such good accounts!"

And therewith the devoted gentleman began to feel apprehensive. At that day far less was known of this amusement than at present. There was but one rink, and that particularly select. To this novel resort the party proceeded. Sir Horace became extremely nervous, he had never been upon anything more slippery than orange-peel and oak boards, and the contemplation of supporting thirteen aunts upon cherry brandy and roller skates, imparted a very grave expression to his face. He felt exceedingly uneven before commencing; what he would feel afterwards he could not fathom.

Sitting in a line, the ladies were about fastening on their skates when the watchful eyes of Miss Penelope detected a man, some distance off, but with face directed their way; and, blushing very deeply, she ejaculated, "Girls!" Like startled fawns, they were alive to danger upon the instant, and likewise blushed most deeply. Sir Horace was then deputed to go and ask the person to turn his head away; so he engaged

the obliging and entirely innocent individual in conversation until he imagined his party to be equipped. They were awaiting his coming with impatience, and severely reproved him for neglecting them to gossip with strangers.

"Do you think it safe, dear Horace?" piped Aunt Phyllis tremulously.

"If you are not nervous, my dear aunts! The main thing is to strike out boldly and with confidence, preserving a balance."

Those who were performing graceful evolutions saw the advent of the new party with dismay, and at once gave them all the area possible.

At last all stood upon the uncertain surface, Sir Horace very near to the edge, six of his dear aunts clinging to him, seven leaning up against him as back to a wall.

The music began to play, and it fired the ladies' enthusiasm. "Push us a little way forward, dear Horace, but for goodness' sake be careful!" That gentleman gave the required propulsion, perhaps rather more actively than expected, for away in thirteen directions darted his aunts, up against as many couples. Then Sir Horace sat down to enjoy the sport. The confusion wrought by the goddesses at the skating-rink was unique. Their efforts to reassume the perpendicular only led to fresh disaster, they were in everybody's way, and at last were requested to retire from the course. This they strenuously refused to do, and were so defiant that the gentlemen present declined to interfere further, and left them to their fate. Thus destitute, the ladies, after some ineffectual attempts, contrived to amalgamate, bearing down, upon the iceberg principle, against all opposing forces. They derived an advantage founded upon their faith, it being simply impossible for a fall to occur while that solidified body remained intact. But their spasmodic appeal to Sir Horace was the strong feature: this he prudently would not notice, pretending to busy himself at the straps of his skates. Very shortly the rink was almost deserted, the advance of that battalion being so formidable that the company resented it by a polite departure. The few who remained endeavoured to exercise themselves undisturbed;

amongst these was an old gentleman of corpulent habit but practised dexterity, who took manifest pride in the expertness with which he contrived his figures. This individual had the misfortune to be tripped up by the excitable team, which fell upon him in a body. It brought matters to a crisis; the band ceased playing, two servants of the ground requested that Sir Horace would withdraw his party. He in turn requested the myrmidons would deliver the message in person, shrugging his shoulders as to warn them to be careful. Apparently the ladies were quite ready to relinquish the field, and, assisted by the servants, they made for port.

"A pretty trick you've played us, Horace! Dragging us to this abominable place, and leaving us to perish on the frozen deep!"

"Then you have not enjoyed the exercise?"

"Enjoyed, indeed! Girls, we will go home."

"I think," put in Aunt Dido coyly, "if we were to have a little something to eat! I declare I feel quite sinking!"

"You see it has done some good," said Sir Horace to Aunt Penelope, with sardonic cheeriness; "it has improved dear Aunt Dido's appetite."

But this time Miss Penelope overruled her voracious sister; she had set her mind upon going home, and home they went.

After tea Miss Penelope and party made a descent upon the library, where Sir Horace was vainly trying to read.

"Horace, are you quite sure dear Marion took the keys? We can't get at the Berlin wool or anything else!"

"And a very good thing too!"

"Horace!" Twenty-six eyelids lifted with ominous effect.

"I mean because you ought to be taking perfect rest."

"Well, have you any new pictures to show us? By-the-bye, we *should* like to see what you're engaged upon now in the studio! Girls, are we united upon this?"

"Certainly!" came with emphatic brevity from all, and Sir Horace began to feel curiously unpleasant. All buzzing at once, it was impossible for him to edge in a word, but when he had that good fortune it was to explain,—

"Excuse me, my dear aunts, but I never like any of my

pieces to be seen until complete; it spoils the effect, and is apt to excite a prejudice."

"Now, don't you trouble, Horace, but come along and open the door, you Bluebeard, you! Our interest is quite piqued."

"I am sorry to disappoint you!"

"But we're not going to be disappointed!"

"I really cannot comply with your request, there are so many things about; get thirteen charming ladies in there, it would make a devil of a mess! I beg your pardon!"

"Oh, fie! How much he resembles Pygmalion!" cried Aunt Circe.

"Happy thought!" said Sir Horace to himself; then aloud, "Exactly—that's just it—I've a study there not quite the thing for your kind inspection; in fact, at this moment, *undraped*—I—"

A singularly horrified expression was the result of this announcement; then Miss Penelope vindictively observed,—

"I can scarcely describe my sense of shocked surprise, Horace! Fortunately, we telegraphed to your poor dear wife this morning that all was not right in the house, and we asked her instantly to return."

Now it was Sir Horace's turn to be violently and justly indignant.

"I think you meddle in much more than there is any occasion for! If you did so telegraph, it was an unwarrantable liberty!"

"There, hear him; only hark at the man!" cried Miss Penelope. "They do so hate to be found out!" confidentially.

Sir Horace was thoroughly aroused. "Will you say plainly what it is you suspect, and are so anxious to scent out? To summon my family in this unceremonious manner I think in execrable taste, and it would have been preferable had you remained in the Midlands.

"Oh yes, of course; you thought you were going to be so nice and quiet all to yourself; but we interfered and marred your pretty plans! To speak plainly, Horace, since you've set us the example, we believe—I think I am right, dear girls, in saying we believe—that some woman is concealed in this house!"

Sir Horace laughed lightly, thinking how near and how far from the truth were the suspicions thus candidly expressed.

"I am happy to be able to disabuse your mind of this grave impression; no woman is concealed in the house."

"There! Was ever anything so unblushingly denied? Girls, my suspicions are not allayed; this attitude is counterfeit. Don't you trouble, Horace, we will discover all."

Too provoked to reply, Sir Horace quitted the room.

He waited upstairs some little time to see if he was followed, but the council being busily brooding over their mischief, he proceeded to act upon an idea that suddenly occurred to him. They *should* see the studio.

His young captive flew to meet him, and he quickly accounted for his long absence, explaining all.

"And I shall soon have my wife and daughters, men-servants and maids, to heighten the perplexity of this precious situation! I don't know which will give me the most trouble, my inquisitive aunts, wondering daughters, or prying domestics. It is imperative for our safety that they should overrun this place. Now, in Miss Penelope's chamber, to which I will take you, is a large, old-fashioned chest, of which they think my daughter only possesses the key; one upon my bunch will, however, open it. If you can dispose of your little self amongst my wife's old cashmeres, stowed away there, (and I remember there is a wide strip of wood off the back, so that you will not stand in peril of being suffocated,) I will lock you in there, but, of course, release you as soon as possible. We have got into a fix between us, and we must help one another to get out of it."

"I don't mind hiding there at all, only, do not forget me!"

"If I do, you must give an unearthly squeak in the middle of the night, after which I do not think we shall be much longer troubled with my aunts!"

"I feel unhappy to have caused this trouble."

"Suppose I tell you I think you are fully worth the trouble, and that you give me pleasure to counterbalance it; will that set your mind at rest, little girl, and change that pitifully pretty face to smiling confidence?"

Her face grew sunny on the instant, and she put up her mouth to be kissed, as in days when she was the petted darling of a father, tender and kind as this gracious gentleman. The action thanked him as no words would have done.

"Now I will put the place to rights, and make it a little more like your room than mine;" she said, lightly removing the traces of her stay, and restoring the retreat to its orthodox artistic disorder. Sir Horace thought his young charge very handy, and he was very much struck by the thoughtfulness displayed. He bestowed in reward a shower of bonbons bought for the purpose, and these she picked up and stored in her pocket. They set out upon the venturesome journey to Miss Penelope's chamber.

Going downstairs, afterwards, Sir Horace smiled to himself at the daring of hiding away the cause of the disturbance in Miss Penelope's own chamber.

When the gentleman returned to the library the greater part of his book-shelves were bare; classified ranges of volumes were jumbled pell-mell, and a general scene of confusion prevailed—mortifying enough to the literary man wishing to lay his hand on any certain volume in an instant. Four of his aunts stood on his superb writing-table, reaching down splendidly-bound works which Miss Minerva was dusting with the hearth-broom.

"Will you not come into the drawing-room, aunt?" (to Miss Penelope). "You'll excuse me, but I shall have great trouble to get my books in order again!"

"Bless the man! Why, the best of writers have their studies higgledy-piggledy, carpet strewn, chairs loaded, confusion everywhere! Our poor father, a great scholar and bookworm, Horace, used to say that the study was not a bookseller's shop, and he liked to see it upside down; he said the surest indication of extensive reading and almost illimitable knowledge was never being able to put your hand on any book you wanted, or remember anything you'd read; this, added our father, stamps the savant, and separates the thinker from the calculator."

After which intelligent and epigrammatic reminiscence, Miss

Penelope left the room, returning quickly with triumphant glee.

"Girls! I've the latch-key of the Bluebeard chamber! Found it in the portemonnaie in dear Horace's walking-coat. Now we shall see what we shall see! But let us prepare; oh, let us prepare! For this may be the momentous incident of our lives! Now, follow me!"

"But, my dear aunts," remonstrated Sir Horace, assuming dismay, "you know not what you do! Think for one instant, should not the privacy of my own personal suite be preserved inviolate? Is it kind? What do you think my wife will say?"

"It is in the interest of our poor sainted Marion we undertake this distasteful office! Don't you trouble, Horace, the truth is bound to come out now! On, girls, be brave, and prepare for the worst!" And the force marched on to the scene of discovery.

With the importance of their mission strongly marked upon eager countenances, the great expedition set out. They had been hunting scandal all their days, but this promised to be a chase worthy of their skill.

The door was quickly unlocked, all crowding forward for the first view of the revelation in store.

When they found but an ordinary studio, with its elegant disorder and unconventional art tastes, they were much chagrined; but Miss Penelope restored the confidence of her league without delay. "Wait awhile, girls! I see through this! There has been jugglery. But the laws of Society are not to be outraged in this barefaced manner! Girls—are we, or are we not, here in the interests of Society?"

Omnes: "Certainly!"

"Very well! And is it not imperative that we should expose this abominable plot, and discover this impudent intruder, before going on to Brighton for Christmas; where, take my word for it, if all I hear and suspect be verified, we shall have our work cut out to find the long and the short of the mystery concerning the famous Minister! Now is our time or never! Girls, separate, and go two and two for safety's sake; let more careful search be made; examine this house

from roof to basement; and may the blessing of the Goddess of Justice rest upon your devotion! I will go alone."

After this impressive invocation there was profound silence, broken by Aunt Dido, who thought "a little something" first might animate their much-tried, languishing endurance. But Miss Penelope would permit no indulgence in the ranks, and with wonderful heroism the battalion divided.

Then Miss Penelope turned with anxiety to her nephew,—

"If it was not for this shocking occurrence, Horace, I should be seriously concerned about dear Aunt Dido—I fear she is going into a consumption!"

Her nephew was cruel enough to laugh outright, "I think it is a clear case of consumption."

With a sternly reproving gesture, Miss Penelope indicated her abhorrence of the jest.

"It is exceedingly annoying dear Marion took those keys!"

"They will be here shortly, if you have done as you tell me."

"Yes, but what are we to do? We brought no fancy-work—the very workboxes are locked, so that we cannot be at plain sewing!"

When the aunts were at their needlework, the confusion of tongues outvied that of the sewing ladies in *Geneviève de Brabant*.

"Lend me your bunch, Horace; possibly we may contrive to open some of the drawers!"

"It is very probable; but do you think as a matter of courtesy, not to say of propriety, it will be the correct thing to do?"

"Don't you trouble about that! We will watch over the propriety! All I can say is, my suspicions are yet further aroused; if it is improper for us to open the drawers, there must be something not proper for us to see, hence we ought to see it."

Sir Horace smiled at this naïve reasoning. The smile exasperated Miss Penelope, who exclaimed, "I feel it is our duty to have in a locksmith, and every box and drawer opened, for we are upon the brink of discovering a terrible crime, or I am mistaken. Oh, Horace, unhappy man, spare us! I conjure

you to spare your much troubled aunts further anxiety, which is killing us, by handing me your bunch of keys!"

"Well, I do certainly think you are the most annoying staff of mischief-making old women to be found in the country! Anywhere but in England you would have been locked up long ago! What Society can want with such blue-bottles, wasps, and cockatrices, I cannot imagine!"

Miss Penelope gave vent to a piercing scream; she had never been spoken to so plainly before in all the course of her honoured professional career. It was shrill as a railway whistle, and recalled her straggling adherents, who swarmed to her assistance with a chorus of inquiry. Miss Penelope, pointing the finger of scorn and outraged sensitiveness at that ingrate, her nephew, cried,—

"He calls us 'cockatrices'! Girls; dear ones; my heart is broken! Did you ever hear of such a thing? After all we have done, all we have suffered, this is our reward!"

"We shall not forget this, Horace," said Miss Iphigenia, with acute sorrow.

"I will abide by your recollection, aunt. I consider such bands of disturbing scandal-mongers the pests of human happiness, existing but to blight man's confidence and wreck woman's honour; living in a poisonous atmosphere upon garbage, with an unclean taste compared with which that of wolves and vultures is sweetness itself! I have the disgrace and irreparable calamity to be connected with you by relationship, and therefore do not expel you, but I sincerely hope one of these days you will meet with a summary dismissal that will teach you a lesson for the remainder of your lives."

They recoiled a step before this outburst of supplementary invective, but Miss Penelope was not to be scared.

"Girls, give me a chair!" A chair was brought, and the leader seated herself stiffly. "It is well, nephew Sir Horace Vivian, that you are appearing in your true colours. You are not the first who has browbeaten the witness when under examination, and thus tried to avert impending punishment. The breach of decorum of which you have been guilty, the immoral conduct, the terrible mystery attendant, exposure

imminent,—all now staring you in the face, you are driven to desperation, and turn upon your best friends—those trying to save you from the consequences of your folly—in a manner at once diabolical and convincing, were any other proof needed, of the enormity of your crime. But don't you trouble, Horace, your aunts are not to be maligned from the path of duty and the defence of decency."

"Amen," murmured Miss Vesta devoutly; and much impressed by their leader's reply, the others plucked up again.

"I will drop a line to my servants," said Sir Horace, with coolness, changing the discussion, "requesting their return. In all probability Marion and the girls will be with us to-morrow, and may not feel as disposed to rough it as yourselves."

"By all means! Very sensible of you. We were wishing to see your servants, if up to the mark, early risers, tidy dressers, clean at their work, small eaters, not wasteful, not fast-looking, and wearing decent and modest caps. We flatter ourselves we know what servants are, changing them as we do about every month; but I'll soon set you to rights, don't you fear, Horace. It's cruel to think of those poor dear girls of yours, inexperienced, guileless, unacquainted with the ways of the designing set, and, in so many words, lambs to the slaughter."

Sir Horace shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of mild contempt. "You may rest assured I shall not permit you or any one to interfere with my daughters' domestic arrangements."

"Oh, of course, you have something contradictory to propose to every scheme of reform we submit. Just like the men, obstinate as mules!"

"I am sorry your experience has proved that unkind fact."

Miss Penelope deigned no reply, but ran on with her gabble. "And this new Companion—a most responsible situation, and well paid for I'll be bound. We must see this person, consider her capacities with a clearer judgment than yourself or the dear girls would be likely to bestow, and tell you honestly if we think her qualified for the situation."

"You need not trouble. Your opinion is not courted!"

"There, girls! You heard that with your own ears! And he called us blue-bottles and cockatrices!"

Glances of deep loathing turned their faces sombre.

Sir Horace began to feel uneasy concerning his charming captive, whom he did not want to be stifled.

"I don't think you've seen the banner-screen Marion worked?"

"Gracious! A banner-screen, and we have not seen it! Just what I said—everything is hidden away in those drawers."

"I'll go and fetch it."

"And I'll go with you, and carry the candle, for you're a shocking one at dropping the grease; all the stair-carpets want brown paper and a hot iron passing over them. I tripped and nearly broke my leg running after a spark you set flying in the corridor: we are so nervous about fire."

"It would certainly tax Captain Shaw's good fellows to the utmost to extricate your party in the event of such a calamity." And a wicked vision of a glorious hecatomb that should relieve the world of this obnoxious band flitted before Sir Horace while accompanying its leader bearing the light. There was no alternative: they went in quest of the banner-screen in company. It was in a chest of drawers close to the hiding-place of the captive, and Sir Horace talked very loud upon entering the room, lest the little one should give vent to an exclamation of joy upon hearing his advance.

All was quiet. He unlocked the drawer where very elegant specimens of fancy work were neatly arranged in order. To Sir Horace's horror his aunt stooped and began smelling in the vicinity of the old oak-chest.

"Am I mistaken, Horace, or do I smell peppermint?"

It was but too true—that child had been at the bonbons, and a particularly pungent odour was pervading the room.

"Well—there—certainly—is—a pepperminty odour somewhere about."

"Yes! and if I'm not mistaken, this precious companion, about whom our opinion is discarded, keeps a sly bottle somewhere, and the cork has come out. If you don't have this old chest open—for this is where it proceeds from—every-

thing will be spoilt. The moth is bad enough, but peppermint! Why, my goodness me! Fancy going into Society smelling of that!"

Replacing the contents of the drawer, Sir Horace was careful to leave his latch-key on the chest. He hoped the child would discover it, and be quick enough to escape to the study.

"Well, I'll run down with the screen, or they will be getting impatient."

"I will go with you!" remarked Miss Penelope imperiously.

"And we will then return to the peppermint—"

"And have it removed, please, or I shall not sleep a wink all night. There is one thing I have a decided objection to, and that is the smell of peppermint; but if admitted—vulgarly admitted—into any house where I may be staying, I must beg leave to superintend its instant removal."

"I sympathize with your delicacy; I don't like it myself!"

"I well remember dear father once saying to me, 'Penny, had a single onion grown upon Olympus, not a god would have ventured upon that transcendent height!' I wonder what he would have said under the provocation of peppermint in his bedroom!"

They found the ladies in the drawing-room, the banner-screen was examined, and great was the discussion thereon. Sir Horace took care to keep it up as long as possible. Then the entire party proceeded to Miss Penelope's chamber in search of peppermint.

A single movement in the chest would have warned Sir Horace that his charge had been unable to release herself from her concealment, and he would have withdrawn his party by some means; but all was still. She had indeed made good use of her time, having crept through the broken back of the chest which stood sufficiently distant from the wall to allow her to escape; she found the latch-key and hastened back to the study.

"Now," cried Miss Penelope, catching up the keys, "we'll see all about this lady-companion indeed, with her smuggled peppermint and superior ways!"

Down upon her knees went the leader, the aunts all

bending over her with eager expectancy; Miss Dido was the only unexcited one of the party, but then Miss Dido was munching a cheesecake. A key was found and the old cashmeres were had out and unrolled,—the well-known lady colours so dear from having been worn long years ago, antique styles, and fashions passed away, and lengths and widths unpicked and pinned in parcels of separate sweet-hued periods; but they found never a thing save this—a tiny strip of paper, the motto of one of the bonbons. This, however, caused an electric shock, and biting of lips, and gruesome looks at Sir Horace. The motto ran,—

> He who conceals his love from slander's grave attack
> Shows skill in that which puts it off the track;
> And gives the lie on cunning mischief bent,
> The grim desert of being off the scent.
> Each scandal-loving spinster-maid
> Shall thus of this be made afraid.

"Better go down to supper, I think," said Aunt Dido.

The confusion of the goddesses was complete, but how indefatigable was that Aunt Penelope!

"Don't you trouble, Horace, we'll find out the composer of that little hymn! Girls," facing round and addressing the squadron with military precision, "I see it all! Girls, sisters, my bosom heaves with indignation! Between this amorous and libidinous effusion there is bacchanal connexion with the horrible spirit we came to remove, and I have sad doubts, which it may not be prudent to disclose, concerning this model companion—companion indeed!"

Here was a diversion from the original, and the quiet, beautiful widow-lady whom Sir Horace honoured exceedingly stood now in jeopardy. Leaving his aunts to digest the lyric of the bonbon, Sir Horace walked down to the library, wondering much whether his little friend had placed it there purposely. "If so," he said to himself, "she is the shrewdest young monkey I've met with!"

Sir Horace permitted a long interval to elapse. His relatives did not disturb him, and he heard them go quietly down to supper and next go as quietly upstairs again. Then hearing

one and another of their chamber doors close softly, he concluded they had retired for the night, and he felt highly relieved in consequence. To make certain, Sir Horace went to the foot of the stairs and listened intently. All was silent, and he was about returning to the library, when a cold gust of wind met him, and set his teeth chattering. He at once thought of his young charge, and hoped the fire had not gone out in the studio, for it was a cold, blustering night, and he feared she would be lonely and cheerless. He would go to her. A task of some difficulty, since he did not know how to communicate with her. He was in favour of trying the courtyard, and a bare alternative was here presented between a shout (eminently hazardous), and a pebble to be thrown at her window. He accepted the latter, and went immediately in quest of the missile; but the flags were barren, so, finding the door unfastened, he explored the narrow lane as diligently as though searching for the original philosopher's stone. The wind, however, cut round his somewhat tender head with disrespectful sharpness, and Sir Horace returned hastily for his warm reading-cap. The door had been closed and secured upon the inner side, and Sir Horace stood, a dismayed and shivering exile, attempting to obtain an entrance. The effort proved fruitless and he hurried round to the front.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW ROLF'S BURGLARY.

When Mr. Bartholomew returned from certain important business he had strode forth to see to, and entered the dingy tenement in Gray's Inn Road, it was to discover the fascinating Mrs. Rolf calmly slumbering, and the little girl he had taken the trouble to entrap for the Chief flown no one knew whither. And Mr. Bartholomew severely reproached himself for his carelessness; but, roughly awakening the presiding genius of his untidy apartments, he reprimanded that lady with even greater severity.

"A pretty thing truly! No sooner caught and safely caged than she has slipped through our fingers! Leave a woman alone for blundering, if she anyhow can!"

"Steady, Bartholomew, steady; many's the time my assistance has been of service!"

"And might have been now! Didn't I tell you Barnard was going to hold the child in reserve for finishing off the Minister?"

"I know! I'm awfully sorry! But now, think. Where will she be likely to go? Does she know where this Mr. Percival lives?"

"I believe not. No."

"Does she know where her mother is living?"

"Sure to!"

"And so surely will find her way there."

"Yes," said Mr. Bartholomew, looking thoughtfully at the golden coil coronetting his lady, "you are right; she will go there safe as the Bank. I think I see my way to killing two

birds with one stone, Mrs. Rolf; I happen to have an engagement down for that particular residence."

Mr. Bartholomew seated himself, rubbed the baldness crowning his long head, passed his thin fingers through the circle of scant grey hair, stretched his legs until his heels were planted one on either side the grate, and appeared deep in reflection. The florid, wolfish features became more prominent, cheek-bones rising high and hard before the flickering firelight.

"Been to Queen Street to-day?" he asked abruptly.

"Drove round this morning!"

"Barnard at home?"

"He came in while I was there—asked whether you had returned!"

Mr. Bartholomew nodded, still looking in the fire.

"Been to the warehouse?"

"Went on to the City after dinner!" This precious pair so thoroughly understood each other, interrogation and reply were interchanged with a curt brevity that was eminently characteristic.

"Much business doing?"

"Things appeared at a standstill—except for the talking going on amongst the young men."

"I'll talk 'em. Want of principle, Mrs. Rolf, eye-service; wasted time ranks next dishonesty!" And like the venerable rogue he was, and very patriarch of hypocrites, the speaker looked gravely conscious of the unfaithful conduct of their clerks and warehousemen.

"Anything further noticeable?"

"Yes. A man was looking at the Indian shawls; questions light and of no moment caught my attention, kept my eyes open, saw him narrowly examine every part of the warehouse, especially the books when he stood by the entry desk."

Mr. Bartholomew drew his breath shortly and whistled—a low danger-signal of warning upon entering a tunnel; but he only said to the stylish blonde, "Some country customer, I suppose, new buyer; what was he like?"

"Medium height, thin, pale, short whiskers meeting under the chin, shaggy eyebrows, grey hair, a quick, abrupt manner,

stealthy watching expression when unnoticed; gentlemanly dress—all black; a long white hand, large blood-stone ring."

"Pass me the album!" The lady handed him a bulky, shabby album. The pages were dirty from large thumb marks, the spaces contained portraits of those who were or might be objects of especial interest; at one of these he stopped, and held it over for the lady's recognition. "Is that him?" She nodded indifferently; apparently, now that she had called his attention to it, she dismissed it from her mind.

"Mr. Penfold," muttered Bartholomew to himself, "solicitor to Mr. Beresford Travers: Mr. Herbert Garston seen to enter the office on Saturday last; this means mischief." Then aloud, "I'll take the 'bus to Bishopsgate, my dear, and turn in at the 'Tuns' for half an hour."

It was the evening following upon that of the events narrated when Mr. Bartholomew set forth upon his pursuit of little Ella. He had no doubt whatever but that he should find the child domiciled in the house of Sir Horace Vivian. In his earlier and less lucrative days Mr. Rolf had participated in the privilege of entering at will such residences as would probably repay his skilled investigation; in other words, and in the language of the vulgar, Mr. Rolf was a more than ordinarily neat-handed burglar. He had moreover enjoyed the supreme honour of instructing his present Chief in the accomplishment. Thus when he set forth with a nice little case of instruments, gravely respectable as some middle-class medical man, and playfully told the golden-haired lady he was about to make a call upon a friend, she, giving him a correspondingly playful thump upon the buttoned-over chest, said,—

"You dear old sinner, you! Now mind and take care of yourself, for I don't want to go into weeds just yet!"

A doleful sentiment, without depressing influence upon the philosophic artist, who, replying, "Leave me alone, my charmer, for taking care of myself! Ta, ta!" with a wolfish sort of kiss, and an oath at the wind for turning his umbrella inside out, before he had proceeded six steps, he jauntily made for the narrower and quieter thoroughfares, having a decided objection to the more garish and highly illumined path-

ways. Thus, in place of proceeding by Oxford Street, Mr. Bartholomew glided decorously round a corner, a shady corner where there did not happen to be a gas-lamp or a dazzling gin-palace, and along a shady street connected. By the quietest and shadiest of streets, coming out by the Marble Arch, and crossing the Park, he selected a dull-looking public-house, where he sat in the bar-parlour until closing time, when he took an easy saunter along Knightsbridge, turning sharp at a dark alley, and waiting there within shadow of a doorway, from which he could see every passer-by while unseen. This was a move very customary in Mr. Rolf's tactics, and it was upon the self-protecting policy, it being so very uncertain whether those interested in his welfare were closer than he considered agreeable. With easy negligence, as though returning to some select home thereabouts, the tall man threaded Wilton Place and Wilton Crescent, and came into Belgrave Square, walking carelessly past the mansion whereat he was about to make a call, noticing with peculiar satisfaction that the family had retired for the night. Then the tall man disappeared: so suddenly, that, had any one been observing from the opposite side, it would have been difficult to define the precise spot of that abrupt vanishing. Mr. Rolf turned up again in a narrow lane at the rear of one side of the square, and proceeded to effect an entrance without delay.

It was Mr. Bartholomew Rolf who fastened the door upon the irate Sir Horace, that gentleman giving his aunts the credit for the hard-hearted action.

Mr. Rolf, thus master of the field for a time, far from suspecting the reception in store for him, stood at the foot of the great staircase. With the utmost caution and circumspection he removed his boots, which he stowed in the pockets of his over-coat, with a small implement in hand, taken from the case and folded in wash-leather, a thick woollen shawl, the property of the blonde, brought for the purpose of enveloping the child, and, if need be, stifling her cries, over his shoulder, he stealthily proceeded upstairs, and for so large a person he certainly moved at pleasure with

singular lightness. Not so light but that he was heard, and that by the lynx-like ears of the goddess Penelope.

The quiet and contented retiring to rest of the tribe had been a craftily organized ruse, "whereby," said Miss Penelope, "we shall catch him! He will think we are asleep, and come stealing upstairs, and then will be our time; but be perfectly still, girls, until I give the signal, then let us pounce upon him!" This ingenious conspiracy and ambuscade was accepted by all but Aunt Dido, who, having eaten an enormous supper, was troubled with heaviness upon the chest, and preferred retiring in earnest; the leader assented, for her sister was sometimes afflicted with tormented slumber arising of indigestion in its most punishing form.

Now it happened to be the chamber door of the ravenous goddess upon which Mr. Bartholomew first operated. That symmetrical plaything he carried encased in leather admitted him noiselessly. It has been described how that Mr. Bartholomew was not in any sense a prepossessing individual; indeed his appearance was calculated to give any nervous person a very severe shock. Thus when Miss Dido, in the throes of nightmare, opened an eye customarily engaged upon similar research to that of the honey-bee, the seeking for sweet provender; that eye encountered, by the dim light of a six-hours' burner deposited in the foot-bath, the ghastly-looking being glowering down upon her, she truly imagined Charon or some other infernal dignitary had waited upon her at last. Mr. Rolf, on his part, when the frilled-in face turned to the light, saw that he had entered the wrong apartment, and withdrew; it was not his design to molest any person, unless molested. Imagine his astonishment at seeing a strong body of females, whose number appeared countless, clustered upon the landing, which, dimly shadowy, might, for all he knew, hold in reserve a throng that would possibly rise in defence and cut off his retreat. Had he made a mistake in the house? Penetrated the sacred precincts of a convent? Or had he to brave the timorously excited garrison of a fashionable boarding-school? A variety of speculative questions darted through the fertile mind of Mr. Bartholomew. He

was no melodramatic burglar with crowbar and a dark-lantern; he rather practised upon the fine-art principle, and thus had not the advantage of a light which would have revealed the number and strength of the enemy. Consciousness of a mistake somewhere dawned upon him, when the foremost of the shadowy females thus addressed him with sepulchral effect,—

"So we've caught you after all—the key to the mystery lies in dear Dido's room!"

"A private lunatic asylum!" said Mr. Bartholomew to himself. He was of a brave nature, of a hardy calibre. There was but one thing on earth that he feared, and that was a female lunatic; but this gave promise of an attack by myriads of shadowy female lunatics, the foremost of whom closing upon him, he deftly lassoed her with the amiable Mrs. Rolf's best woollen shawl; then, clearing the stairs six at a bound, made for the front door amidst the yells and shrieks of the astonished females. Forcing open the door, and knocking over a gentleman waiting to be admitted, the noble owner in fact, Mr. Rolf made the circuit of the square with considerably more expedition than when upon the cool inspection of the buildings. He felt exceedingly savage, and to a large extent puzzled; and ultimately resolved that but one head could ever explain it, or deal with the odd occurrence—the head of his friend Noel Barnard.

CHAPTER XV.

SIR HORACE'S DEVICE.

When Sir Horace had recovered from the onslaught which fairly took his breath away, and entered his house, it was to discover his aunts standing step above step in a state of the wildest excitement. Their nephew was as much astonished as his devoted relatives; but these indulged in bitter censure, reproaching him for surreptitiously leaving the house in the dead of the night, and exposing them to peril from assassins and everything else that is hideous stalking at midnight.

"Well, it's pretty certain," said Sir Horace, "that a man has obtained an entrance; but when and how is more than I can fathom; neither can I conceive what for."

"What for?" echoed Aunt Penelope indignantly, "Why, of course he knew that we were here; his diabolical purpose glared upon us from his fierce eyes. It was abduction, Horace! In the miscreant who has fled before our determined resistance there lives the modern Brian de Bois-Guilbert. Feel thankful, Horace, your poor dear aunts have escaped the peril."

Sir Horace was wicked enough to laugh at this. "I think you may be mistaken," he said simply; "the man's object was probably plunder."

"Just what we say; and we wish we had never entered this house—we feel no longer safe."

"Great Jove!" murmured the irreverent nephew, while the ladies hastened to the chamber of their sister with shocked and horrified expressions of countenance; for had not the midnight monster been seen to quit that very apartment?

In sorry groups they stood around her couch, and the confused movement awoke the gentle sleeper. Self-possessed in a moment, and glancing at the circle of lowered eyelids, she asked faintly, "How long to wait before breakfast?"

With a moan of anguish, utterly overcome, the more spiritualized Miss Penelope left the room. Sadder and wiser, the goddess sisters followed in her rear.

Meantime Sir Horace had availed himself of the opportunity to try the outer door of the retreat, and it yielded to his pressure. Little Ella had long expected his coming: she had been patiently waiting, unaware how near she had been to another and a worse danger. Sir Horace would not excite her terror by any description of recent events; and he had a more anxious thought, for, according to the natural order of things, this would be their last stolen meeting; Lady Vivian would certainly be home upon the morrow, and something must be done. Very tenderly he detailed pressing difficulties, and said,—

"We shall soon have to part, I fear, my little girl; and I am sorry! I should be glad if you could stay with us entirely, and look upon our house as your home."

"And I should be glad also, for I love you very much—very much!"

Her eyes were full of tears; she had taken his hand half reverently and pressed it to her lips. It was a pretty action, and moved him; he kissed her white brow gratefully. "You are a dear affectionate child, and should not be tossing upon the sea of life alone."

"Nay, I have my mother; and when I once find her, all will be well."

"Poor child!" thought Sir Horace, "how simply she talks, little thinking of all that may have happened to her mother long ere this!" Then aloud, "Yes, but until your mother is restored to you, something must be done; you will require looking after, and this is what I am worrying my head over."

Ella seemed thoughtful, and for a time was silent. Sir Horace also was quietly revolving his plans. "I wonder

whether she would?" he asked of himself aloud. "It might at least be represented to her." Ella thought he referred to her ladyship; and it was with a beating heart she heard him thus explain,—

"The lady who is now acting as the friend and travelling companion of my daughters told me she either had, or once had—I'm sure I forget which—a little girl, and I noticed that her voice trembled when she alluded to the child. From the emotion displayed I am sure she loved her child ardently, and would, I feel certain, be won by your present motherless position. If I could but represent the whole affair to this lady she might, at least for a time (until your own mother be discovered), adopt you as her daughter. This just occurs to me as a means of extricating us from our plight—what do you think of it?"

Thrilled and affected beyond measure, the naturally ingenuous and warm-hearted little girl could sustain her part no longer, but bursting into tears, half of joy and half of sorrow that she had not told him before, and burning hot with lovely confusion, she explained all to him with a broken quivering eloquence that was inexpressibly touching.

The genial Sir Horace grasped both the humour of the situation and the delicate position in which the child had found herself placed; while fully sympathizing with her reticence he was charmed with the outburst of candour, and said cheerfully—"Well, do not cry, little girl, my scheme will answer just as well, and a degree better: make yourself quite happy, we shall manage it beautifully, I can see!"

Happy! Nay, the birds twittering away below the caves were not more happy than was Ella now, with her mind relieved of any sense of duplicity, and her heart's truest affections permitted to assert their sovereignty.

Her gratitude—and upon this she could put no control—was very deep, too deep for many words; and when later on Sir Horace returned to his books he felt more satisfied and self-possessed than for a long time past.

CHAPTER XVI.

'WALTER' PROMPTS REMEMBRANCE OF ST. AUBYN.

THERE was delicate entanglement at the woodland studio. Lord Ellerby, with his love of youth and of beauty, and his intense sympathy with the artistic and the aspirations for the ideal, could not but be deeply interested in the impassioned boy with the lovely face; and, partly for his own pleasure, partly for the pleasure of the boy's friend 'Walter,' he gave him open invitation to the house. This Master Lorry accepted unhesitatingly; it was too great a temptation to resist. Besides, Lorry was eminently dutiful, and his clever Mamma had so strictly enjoined him, if by good fortune he should cross paths with St. Aubyn's fugitive, to improve his acquaintance with that vivacious young lady, that he felt bound to do so. Moreover, he was impressed by her beauty, and a little startled and much perplexed by the quaintness of her mode of conducting herself. Unconsciously he was falling into most perfect obedience and compliance with his accomplished parent's injunctions. He began to love this strange girl, and was proportionately perplexed, because, for the life of him, he could not understand which of his two companions he loved the most. But he was a little afraid of the high-spirited Lena, while fascinated by her childish ingenuousness and dainty moods, varied as the sunshine; and he would turn to 'Walter' with appreciation stronger than ever, and dwell with the tenderest thoughts upon her graver and more exquisite charms. Altogether there was delicate entanglement in the artist's home.

As a matter of fact, Lena was really exposed to considerable

risk, what with the artist himself, and this captivating boy. She really and truly felt that she loved 'Walter' with no slight measure of attachment. It was a curious dilemma, and it spoke volumes for her love for St. Aubyn that she preserved it pure, unapproached, uninjured, undiminished. Yet was she exposed to danger of a subtle kind, for the first time, all unsuspected by herself, and increasing with every hour. The result might have been perilous to that first place St. Aubyn occupied in her heart, had it not been for 'Walter,' who, very observant, knowing much of the world, and more of the heart, saw this girl—the friend, companion, sister—menaced by mixed hazard, and in imminent risk of being entoiled and enmeshed in the silken fetters of a foolish day-dream. So 'Walter' talked to her gently of home, and fanned the memory of the past, awakening trepidation in her bosom, and leading the playful truant to consider how strange St. Aubyn must think this lengthened absence. "And be careful," said the monitor, "lest he should never forgive you. Great love may be bent, but it may also be broken; and not all the penitence of innocence and sorrow can heal wounds caused lightly and unthinkingly." Lena saddened thereat, but was very far from fearing any change of this kind in the love of her poet-guardian. "Still for all that, I must be getting home as soon as ever I can!" she said. But the company of Lorry and the artist was very pleasant to her, and for the day at least she still stayed on, despite that friendly warning.

She did not know the lonely soul that was beating its passionate sorrow out against the bars of its isolation: did not know of his awful seasons when despair was the pillow whereon his aching head tossed feverishly: did not know of an anguish, the plaint of sorrows that cannot die, and wail of hopes that will not live. Lena knew nothing of the grey coast-line of trouble that sometimes bounds half a life, whereon pangs and memories loom massive as monster blocks of ebony, a Titan chain of sad remembrances which create the barrier forbidding passage. Such limits to a love were happily unknown to her, and, with the buoyancy of childhood, she thought that the tearful explanation, the caress and wooing to

forgiveness, would make all right, and restore the tender kindness, ay, and the loving confidence; for the one would be useless without the other.

In that dim and solemn chapel to the right of the High Altar in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, in Florence, is a painting, the "Miracle" of Filippino Lippi, which possesses the curious attraction of failing to impress the beholder in any marked manner, but which grows upon one afterwards when time and distance and change of scene should apparently obscure its detail and feature, if not its recollection altogether. The strange, subtle touches, the sensitive expression, the infinite delicacy, live vividly and dwell in the heart long after broad canvas dreams, the pride of the fair city of flowers, have faded from the mind. So Lena now reflected upon all that wondrous wealth of love and careful solicitude, all the delicate forethought and devoted tenderness which from her childhood had been bestowed upon her by him from whom she had fled.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PILGRIM AND THE SHRINE.

A WOMAN, bitten by keen gusts of wind, was walking along a white road, bare of border foliage, the skeleton limbs of weird-trees tracing fantastic figures upon her path.

A moon-lighted way, but bleak, scoured by the pioneer blasts of winter.

The wind cut the homely face, and scattered the bandings of grey hair with malicious disregard as often as she smoothed them patiently back, while she quickly continued her way as though some momentous issue were at stake.

She was an elderly woman, but a sturdy walker, and kept on with indomitable energy; past mile-stones that told how far she had come, how far she had to go; past finger-posts that pointed the way with spectral form, and bore the curt inscription To LONDON. Past solitary churches, standing upon the outskirts of broad parishes, the moonlight defining the square and massive walls of stone; past dwellings of the wealthy, mansions isolated and environed by plantations, a light through crimson curtains reminding the pilgrim of another stately residence left far back upon the road; past farms, peacefully still; penned cattle below sloping sheds, grey ricks, ponds overspread with the first thin coat of ice; past cottages where the country-folk had long ago retired to rest:—and the woman experiences a pang as each is left behind, remembering a small cottage in another part of England, where each night an old mother, laying her glasses upon the Bible, clasps her hands in silent prayer for her only daughter.

It is night, it is time for rest; it is cold, it is time for

warmth; it is hunger-time with her, it is the season for refreshing exhausted nature; but she disregards them all obstinately.

Her small stock of money was lessening day by day; with homely calculation she had believed it would carry her through her journey if she spent none of it upon travelling. She had overheard sufficient of Mrs. Brandon's scheme to understand that the treacherous woman had succeeded in aiding the child's cherished wish. And when Martha Saxe learnt this, after her suspicions had been aroused, and she had made fruitless search for Lena over the whole house and grounds, she never paused to ask herself if she were equal to the mission, but went straight to her own room and dressed for a long pilgrimage, saying nothing of her plan, and leaving unobserved, taking with her little enough, but yet her whole worldly wealth.

"He has been a good, kind master to me," she said, while descending the steep cliff, thinking how bitterly St. Aubyn's heart would be pierced should he return before his darling was brought back, "and Lena I love as though I were her foster-mother; I'll bring her back to him, if I walk my feet off, and kill myself with weariness!"

It was a dogged, uncultivated fondness and devotion; but the heart was in it.

She knew that, for a long distance at least, the young explorer must keep to the old coaching road, for the line of railway was remote, and the nearest station was miles upon the route. And she walked very swiftly, hoping after all, to overtake her fugitive young lady. Sad, disappointed in her search, toiling on from point to point with a heart that was growing heavier, accepting the consciousness that she must walk on to London to find her whom she sought. And she set forth upon the remainder, the apparently interminable remainder, of her pilgrimage, with a devotion partaking more of the dumb faithfulness of the brutes than that of a human being. Merely a simple, uncultivated countrywoman in domestic service; and upon this pitiless night-march, blown-upon, frost-nipped, faint with cold, aching with weariness,

uncertain of the issue of her quest, not knowing and not caring for anything else, for was not the child whom she loved, wayward, spoilt, fickle, petted, loved through it all and beyond it, adrift? Upon the wide world somewhere. Adrift!

And she had no compass, nor guide, nor chart, to direct her, save that love of hers, and for that she would walk till the child was found; would walk every street in the City, would walk till she dropped, and then—well, then she would sit at some street corner and watch every face that passed, watch by day and by night, watch till sight grew dim and eyes went blind, and then—then would sing through the streets, all the length and the breadth of them, sing one of the child's own favourite songs, sing until the child's voice answered, and her labour or her life would end.

There was plenty of sight and strength and sinew left as yet, however, and she marched sturdily on, crooning a ballad learnt on the country-side where, with others, she had despoiled the hop-poles and gathered in the green bloom of Kentish gardens. It was rather a dolorous ditty out there by herself, and the crisp echoes seemed to snatch at it, and distort it into something supernaturally hollow and weird. She clapped her hands for warmth, and the noise frightened her. A rabbit ran across her path; like all the rest it was grey, and she thought this small comfort. How long the stars were in twinkling! Many a night she had watched beneath their tender light, but they seemed to dislike appearing upon this night of endless greyness. She passed a road-side ale-house; the sign was covered with rime, the porch crystallized, the waggoner's bench shining like glass, the horse-trough caked with ice, the small shed at the rear a dim, colourless hollow; no lights; all silent, while the tenants slept their first heavy sleep.

She just sighed, stamped with her feet, rubbed her hands together, and went on.

The ale-house was left behind; then there was a bleak common, a half-frozen morass, where a bed of alders, straight and thin, seemed to be holding a mist that had settled like a tent all about the fenny oasis. There was a strange building, where some man once had built a tower, and had seated himself therein at

night, with a great glass by which he read star-language, the letters of which are countless; and when he had passed from his tower and flown to yet clearer knowledge, another man, to utilize the thing, (not one with astronomical research,) turned it into a chimney, added a lime-kiln, and made lime and bricks; earth again! But it had its uses, it cheered the tramping wayfarer, dispersed the chill mist, sent up a volume of smoke—only grey on grey certainly, but variety, which is the death of monotony. And it made a noise; a rumbling, subterranean noise, but it was a change from the quiet ghastliness of the wayside; thus that tower and its lime-kiln corrected the quagmire, and, albeit with grumbling and with smoke, made it bearable; and this is the use of neighbourliness.

What would Society be without such corrective influences? What, the air of summer without its poison-consuming flies? Martha Saxe did not trouble herself about this; she walked up to the burning mass brisk and brusque, warmed herself all round, and walked on again. A thin air seemed to have risen; there was a crispness and keenness, a tremulous quivering and peculiar distinctness attached to things seen and heard. It was the birth of a new day, when the morrow had commenced; she did not know this, but attributed the singular feeling to quitting the kiln, and shook herself, and pinned her tartan shawl tighter, walking on with quicker strides and a reliant look up at the hueless vault, as she muttered—

"Bless 'em, the gems!"

It was the stars. As though suddenly released, they had burst forth, spread broad, o'er-arching, glittering, merrily bright, as though joyous at being liberated; and they were wonderful company.

"Wherever have you been all this time?" and Martha looked at the most roguish as though she would like to give them a good shaking. She did not suppose they would hear, but it was sociable having a word with them, and as she recognized one after another as she had seen them nights back in her history, it was with as genial greeting as one bestows upon the faces of chance companions of our travel.

Once she asked a stranger how far it was to London? The

destination had seemed nearer by a long span; but there were still miles to go, and she could not tell whether or not another day would close before she entered the City. "I wish I could go up yonder," she thought, "and look to see how far it is off!"

A clearer grey was extending far and wide. The limbs of long lines of trees were more sharply defined. No colour as yet; the outline, however, became more vigorous, more easily traced upon the finer horizon. And still sparkling, as caught in the trellis of boughs, her friends, those cheering stars!

Not much poetry in her, but an uncultured piety that was deeper than culture, and this told of One who held those stars for guidance and direction. She passed a wayside chapel, unadorned, bare, bleak as the lands, yet it was of her faith; and she, who knew not it is the custom in countries far remote from her own, knelt down by its door and prayed that He who directed and guided both men and stars so wisely, would shape her course unerringly.

Then she went on her way again.

Stones upon the road shone back the pale glimmer of the sky. "If these were jewels," she thought, "I would gather all I could carry, and sell them when I get to London, to help me in my search."

She passed a tiny brook. She had never been told of Tennyson, but she heard this, babbling away, and said to it, "Why don't you tell me how far off my lady lies, by starlight?" She had once laughed pleasantly at the jingle, in an earlier home where the young master sang it, when he had been wont to tell this favourite servant of loves and peccadilloes he did not tell his parents.

The brook curved and cornered onwards to a wood; the banks were laden with leaves, bronze seemingly, by daylight russet and red, as when, blushing to the sunset, they fell in odorous autumn.

She recalled the years gone by, the garden on the cliff, and thought yearningly of the little feet that had used to scatter other russet leaves while playing with the master's hound; of a kissable wee mouth lifted prettily for a caress; of a

chase amongst the roses, and a bounding to the brink until her very heart had been still, and she could not cry out; of the little nook in the sloping lawn, where Princess had bidden her bury the slender limbs beneath whole showers of the fallen cactus bloom, and when the dainty little face had peered from out the gorgeous coverlet like the sole white flower of a garden of crimson; of games at hide-and-seek, when like some fairy Lena would part the leaves of wide-spanned, pale-flowered shrubs, and glide upon her homely playmate from odd corners of the wilderness. It had been all one sweet and pleasant time, and, if this faithful soul could restore it, she would feel content.

Somehow she had wandered away from the wide white road although pursuing a parallel direction. She did not trouble, so long as she was right, and this was all in her way.

The brook wound down to a canal, a broad intersecting course, the paths of which in summer-time were held in favour for the rural surroundings. Some distance ahead, advanced a light slowly along the sluggish water-way, where a barge was floating its weighty burden Citywards. Nearer, a horse came in sight, toiling with jerky irregular progress along the bank. It all bore a weird, looming, silent effect, and the woman stood aside while the bulky freight glided past, and on.

A wood extended almost to the bank of the canal. By its means indeed large rafts of timber had been floated thence to yards amongst great buildings, where a teeming population, going home from factory work, watched the thing wonderingly, and speculated on the distance to where those girded trees had grown.

The brook was left behind, the canal was lost sight of, the pathway bore round and through the wood until it joined the road some distance from the point where she left it. But she was not out of the wood yet.

Now, she did not lose the path, or get lost, or discover a cave, or disturb poachers, or meet with any terrible adventure; but she did just come upon some still smouldering ashes of a goodly-sized fire not long since abandoned by a tribe of nomads,

who, having broken up their camp, were journeying elsewhere.

There was sufficient heat remaining to warm this poor woman's hands, and she leaned over the embers of wood and peat, warming herself and feeling glad. She pulled the pieces together and made a comfortable little fire; she fanned this, and a well-dried twig was caught into a blaze. The recesses of the wood were lighted up, gaunt tree-trunks stood forth like scaffolding, a maze of grey paths and misty coverts were discovered by the flickering blaze, a rusted trap was hanging from the branch of a tree, and the smoke crept up through rime-laden boughs, the wood crackled and made noises like footsteps on dried sticks, and from looking at the fire she could not see distinctly, yet as by glimmering consciousness she knew that she was not alone. Half afraid to turn her head, she felt her hands tremble above the blaze which she now wished would suddenly die out, with all its attendant revelations. By a species of rude instinct she knew the quickest method of regaining the powers of vision was by looking fixedly upon something dark; she looked upon the ground, and gradually the sight adjusted its delicate perception; she could distinguish, ay, and discover! Upon the ground she saw a simple thing, no more than a small bow of tasteful ribbon, but it aroused her to instant cautiousness. She recognized it; made by her own hand, it had been worn at a tender throat by a cherished girl dear to her as life, and her whole being thrilled at the discovery.

With apparent carelessness, but with a fierce grip, she secured it: still certain some shadowy watch was upon her, and, while rising, she consigned it to her pocket; then turned, to find the chill warning verified.

Between the grey skeleton trees, in the front of grey paths and misty coverts, the gloomy recesses arching a long perspective of cloisters, there stood the man whose visit to the House upon the Cliff had caused wonder, whose singular presence had inspired feelings of blended distrust and awe.

Unfolding his arms, and striding into the open space beside the fire, Noel Barnard stood before the woman, with

commanding attitude, and, as it seemed to her, a stern expression of countenance.

"I meet you far from home, Mrs. Saxe! May I ask what brings you out upon such a chilly night?"

With a quiet courtesy and perfect respect, the woman answered according to her custom—truthfully.

"Our young lady has been decoyed from her home: I overheard Mrs. Brandon trying to poison her mind and make her discontented. Directly I found the darling had left the house, while our master was away, I set off, to follow her, to find her, to bring her back."

It was a strange meeting this, in the grey dawn, by those smouldering embers; and the shifting lights, or the thoughts troubling him, caused the tall man's face to change curiously.

"You appear tired—how long have you been walking?"

"Every step of the way; you know how far back it is? I know nothing of miles and distance."

"A singular proceeding, Mrs. Saxe; has it struck you the pursuit is a degree foolish?"

She turned upon him angrily. "It has struck me that may be the view taken of it; I do not heed; were the child all to you she has been to me, you might not call it foolish."

More grey, more troubled became the face: then he held forth his white, weird hand.

"Give me your hand, Martha Saxe, you are an honest and faithful woman; your devotion will be rewarded."

She gave him her hand, very much surprised, and trying, with shrewd common sense, to reconcile the sudden apparition of this person with the discovery of that tell-tale bow of ribbon. She stole inquiring side-looks all about her, that aroused cautiousness preparing her for anything; she stole searching glances upon right hand and left hand, darting a quick scrutiny at the iron cast of features before her.

"I understand," he remarked slowly, measuring his words, as by intuition he fathomed his companion's thoughts; "you wonder how far from a dropped gew-gaw may the owner be found? Good: not far, so the loss be known. But now to ease your mind, my faithful soul, I will tell you that Miss

St. Aubyn is perfectly safe, at no great distance from where we stand, and that you shall be with her very shortly."

The words were spoken seriously, with none of the characteristic mocking drollery, and she felt an intensity of gratitude beyond description. To hear that the child was safe, and that her sojourning-place was known to this stranger, first seen by the faithful woman as a guest at her master's table, caused her joy she had little expected thus early on her course. Simple though she was, foolish though she might be, her worth and patience and devotion were so marked that they won recognition even of her usually unimpressionable companion. He believed the heart would have beat its poor life out upon those lone roads and highways for the sake of that dearly-loved fugitive, and he was right.

"Now listen to what I am about to say. Your young mistress is in the care of a gentleman who, were we to go by daylight and demand the fugitive, would probably refuse to hear anything we had to say—first from his liking for her, and next for the sake of Mr. St. Aubyn, to whom alone, no doubt, he will voluntarily surrender her. I can admit you to the house and direct you to her chamber—are you prepared to undertake the rest?"

"I will go through fire and water for my dear child."

"Very well: you will have to go through neither; leave your shoes down-stairs and move about softly; cross the hall, mount the stairs facing the entrance; the second front room above is occupied by Miss Lena; take care, however, your young lady does not scream and alarm the artistic dreamer in charge. Now, Mistress Martha Saxe, here are ten sovereigns wherewith to take yourself and companion home. You will keep any money remaining as a slight acknowledgment of your service. You wonder why I display this interest,—this generous interest, as you will think it? Frankly, Mrs. Saxe, I am a philanthropist, having the welfare of your young lady and of all such, very much at heart, and deeming it at once a privilege and a duty to help them when in my power. I feel for this poor child, so differently placed from what she ought to be, under the roof of the stranger, at the mercy of the deuce knows who! I see a tear in your eye,

Mrs. Saxe. No? Ah, then I was mistaken, I am very tender-hearted, a sore failing; but never mind, it is better than being hard and stern and unfeeling: and you will take care to get her home quickly as possible, obliging me by not mentioning my name in connexion with Miss St. Aubyn's recovery, either to herself or to her Papa. Take all the credit, my dear Mrs. Saxe, for you richly deserve it."

"I will observe your wishes, sir, and thank you kindly. I'm grateful to you, for if it wasn't for the help you are lending I might have been a long time finding my young lady, and a still longer time getting home again."

"Now for it, then; let's see what sort of a hand you are at a burglary. It behoves every honest person, Mrs. Saxe, to be acquainted with those arts practised by the dishonest, in order that one may successfully understand the method of working recognized by the unprincipled. A few years ago I was presented to some Monarch—forget the fellow's name—out in the East—'Are you wise man or rogue?' asked he, recognizing no medium. Of course I would not understand the impertinent and personal query; but the interpreter explained to me that his Majesty greatly preferred the society of the latter, since he could learn so much from them of use in the government of his country, while their learning would not outshine his own. I immediately admitted myself to be the biggest rogue extant, whereupon he had the Grand Vizier stripped of his purple, and decked my unworthy self therewith; and the very first honourable duty appointed me was to break into the said Grand Vizier's palace and rob him of his last, and of course favourite, wife, whom the wicked Monarch had likewise taken a fancy to. Our approaching exploit reminds me of it, Mrs. Saxe. If I hadn't previously received instruction in the operation from a reformed housebreaker, I shouldn't have known how to set about it, and should have sacrificed my head, for that enlightened Monarch was one of those with whom failure was simply an introduction to the executioner. However, I had the honour of effecting an entrance; we also effected the theft; but in the morning his Sublime Majesty, coming to see the lady himself, discovered her to be contrary to his

anticipations, and took a violent dislike to her. As Rogue-in-Chief the delicate and pleasant office fell to my lot the succeeding night of smuggling the fair Vizieress back again. Having deprived her spouse of the purple, he naturally exhibited anything but an amicable regard for myself, and my ingenuity was again taxed how to save my head. I addressed the Monarch at some length, upon the glory attending the successful accomplishment of any uncommonly arduous undertaking, and told him how reluctant I should be to deprive him of one iota of his well-deserved renown,—well-deserved, Mrs. Saxe, because he was the most terrible scamp in his very warm dominions. I discoursed at random, (as is my custom in the presence of royalty, from the excitement consequent upon proximity thereto,) but with extreme impressiveness; his majesty being particularly moved by my recounting how, in my own land, the poets made immortal the illustrious performers of such achievements. In short, I fired his ambition to so extraordinary a degree that he positively would not allow me to have anything to do with it. And he accomplished the feat, conveyed the much-wronged lady back to the harem he had despoiled, and, I presume, had the additional temerity to run upon an ambush of ebony avengers whose scimitars bereaved their country of its sire. Shocking goings on out that way, Mrs. Saxe! We have much to be thankful for—I hope you contribute to the Foreign Missions? I expect some day to be President of one of these estimable Societies. 'I live with one hope, Mr. Barnard,' a lady friend said to me once; 'it is that you may yet address us in Exeter Hall!' 'Madam,' I answered, 'whenever the discernment of my fellow-creatures calls me to that noble platform, rest assured I shall not be backward in coming forward; our race, like our books, has been my study; literally, I have lived upon the black and white, and I may say I have profited by this intimate fellowship.' She appeared to be much affected, but one can never tell whether this sort of thing is real, Mrs. Saxe; and if there is one thing more despicable than another, it is the assumption of false sentiment. Now, cross the kitchen. Softly does it! Good-bye, and don't forget."

All the time of his apparently idle chatter, which, like all that he said and did, had an object, he was leading the way; so taking up her attention that she had not noticed the route, beyond the lane leading to the main road; and, before she was conscious of his actions, executed with the finesse of leger-demain, he opened the door of the woodland cottage, and she was lightly dismissed with the adieu described; and it was with a singular sensation that Mrs. Saxe thus found herself in somebody's kitchen at the break of the dawn. The bright pots and pans on the shining black shelf below the dresser recalled the ebony avengers and their scimitars, mentioned by her eccentric guide, and the poor country soul shuddered as she thought of the trouble and danger which might assail her. This part of her mission was distasteful; still she would not care if Lena was but found.

Standing thus, she reflected. Her instructions had directed her to pass by way of the kitchen door, opposite that through which she had come, to the hall, when she was to proceed by the stairs facing the entrance, to the upper story, where the second front room was occupied by her long-sought-for darling. All this was plain enough; yet the stealthy course necessary went against her scruples: such proceeding was contrary to the code of open Honesty. Still, for her! It was for her! She closed the outer door softly, and, so strong was the force of habit, even in the house of the stranger, locked it, for security of the inmates. She removed her boots, finding time, while sitting to unlace them, to admire the resplendent cleanliness of the kitchen utensils. Then she noiselessly opened the kitchen door and crossed the hall. Its dusky woods and crowd of curious objects did not stop her; she came from a grander mansion, one room of which would have stored all the quaint trifles of this cottage; moreover, by the pale dim light they were seen in their most weird aspect, when colour and form alike were almost imperceptible. On the stairs were hung paintings; these also seemed uncanny, classical pieces, and Martha knew nothing of the classical. A broad landing above, a long stretch of carpet of a dark shading, panelling of pine-wood everywhere; two rows of doors, polished; and she stood

before the second, facing the front of the house. She tried this gently and half reverently, feeling, however, surprised and sorry that it was not secured upon the inner-side, thinking more for the moment of her young lady's safety than of the immediate object in view; she did not know that bolts and bars were foreign to the owner's theory. Thus the door opened easily, and she was at liberty to enter, and did so, taking the precaution to close it behind her. Instantly she was in another sphere, light, elegant, fair as are the chambers of the young in France, where wealth outvies itself upon chaste embellishment of the portals of sleep. She saw the child instantly, enshrined amidst muslin and lace, the dim light through pink curtains tinting the cheeks with a lovelier hue than Martha thought she had ever seen there; or it might have been the pretty flush from dreams, or the fancy after all that the darling was more beautiful in her eyes than of old.

With great tenderness she awoke her, hushing the little startled cry with kisses.

Raising herself upon the pillows, Lena put her arms about the woman's neck.

"Well, you are a dear darling old love of a Martha! But tell me, how is Papa? How did you find me? Is he here? Was he very very angry? Is—"

"Hush-sh! I want to get you away without any one knowing, in case it is prevented; you must dress, and wrap up well, and this time to-morrow you shall be in your own little bed at home."

"I must not leave like that, I have been treated so kindly, and I have a friend I don't like parting from, the most beautiful boy you ever saw in all your life, and so gentle, more like a girl,—I am nothing to it!"

Martha smiled, remembering various redoubtable adventures of which this wild one had been the heroine. Embracing her once again, she pleaded that no time might be lost. Still Lena was very irresolute, and Martha, with low, earnest speech, besought the child, for Mr. St. Aubyn's sake, to go with her, and at once.

Unwillingly assenting, unable to resist that strongest of

pleas, she slowly dressed herself, and stood ready to accompany her new-found protector, whose ideas of right, and of the view Mr. St. Aubyn would entertain of it, all impelled her to hurry the child from the place as quickly as possible.

They made good a retreat without alarming any one in the house, and hastened along the lane and out upon the main road, without speaking, and feeling very cold and miserable in the frosty morning air.

"We shall find snow when we reach Yorkshire, or I am mistaken!" said Martha, with a weather-wise look at the sky.

"Never mind that so long as there is a warm welcome and Papa's forgiveness for my naughtiness; but I can't think how you found out where I was. You've much to tell me."

"God, who directs the stars, Miss Lena, directed me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

REPULSED.

St. Aubyn could not have described to any human being the sorrow at his heart. There is a deeper pain than language tells, a sadder grief than friendship fathoms, and even the kind old pastor knew nothing of that extremity of suffering which the stricken man, like many another, kept veiled from all. In the lull between pain and pain, the pauses in the conflict of agony, the resting pillowed upon remembrance and hope, there visited him memory of old days of pain upon which this dreaded thing had loomed a shadow of what might by terrible misfortune befall him, when he had put it from him, hatefully. It required but little to thrill the old chords afresh and draw up from long years the wailing of dead pain,—but little to trim the lamps in long avenues of gloomy thought,—but little to strike the changes of forgotten sobs on heart-strings wet with tears.

The melancholy hauteur of manner increased. He would live alone with his sorrow as he had lived apart with his purpose; this he knew would have won no sympathy, so his trouble would possess no interest. Hence the solicitous efforts of first one and then the other of his deferential lady comforters caused him some slight surprise. Sometimes in the great drawing-room his eyes would rest wonderingly upon the woman who had been the friend and companion of her he had lost. It seemed strange, that immovable calmness, in contrast with his tempest-shaken soul; she might have presided over the dominion of Repose, and represented the eternal concentration of Calm, so undisturbed was her serenity. He could not understand it! Why, he was all jarred and un-

strung, trembling and languid as one weakened by severe illness! Then he would look long and yearningly at the other, the friend of the older years, who knew how he could love, knew how he had suffered; and there was only the long-remembered captivating smile, the pleasing play of amiability, the inseparable grace and elegance. And one was as great a mystery as the other in presence of his great sorrow. Goethe even at the height of popularity, and in the full blaze of hero-worship, claimed for his thought a selectness of aristocracy which utterly excluded the familiar; so these feminine vulgarians, with their artifice and finesse, were, in spite of all the subtlety of over-acted manœuvres, kept at immeasurable distance by that sad yet gracious hauteur, in which from the commencement of this trouble he had more than ever enfolded himself. Terribly alive and sensitive to everything that reminded him of her, he could not bear to hear the loved name mentioned; and this new sorrow revived the older trouble, brought up from well-nigh forgotten dreams the slumbering pain that still thrilled. Of course these comforters must harp, one upon the past, the other on the present—wearily to him—almost beyond his patience.

St. Aubyn's reflection upon human nature was not of the most gentle order; it was an increasing conviction that life is shockingly imperfect in its moral tendencies. Once the old pastor said to him,—

"Much may be gathered of that portion of humanity even which has strayed; fair fruits of promise, and flowering gleams of goodness, brighter than will be gleaned in long galleries of virtues, reaching down the lives like rent-rolls; and these shreds of broken beauty, sorted and shaded, and pieced and blended, live with us long after the darker surroundings are dead."

But St. Aubyn would accept none of this reasoning; if the moral was good, somebody else might benefit by it. There was a line laid down in his own mind whereby human nature should abide, and if good there was, it would preserve itself consistent with that line; he could not go hunting about in the dark after an accident, to find it.

Old Mr. Arden might argue, and did argue, that Lena could make many such explorations all uninfluenced and uninjured; but his friend was a passionate lover, and jealous of his love. Once gone, gone altogether, was the brief basis of his principle. But "Not so," said the apostle of forbearance, who, having outgrown love, could afford to extol forgiveness. "No heart so fond as the repentant."

There was a limbo for the repentant somewhere, doubtless, but it should not be at the House upon the Cliff. And over this matter the master rather inclined an ear to the subtle theory of the companion, who unceasingly, and with quiet delicacy, mourned for her poor darling, exposed this long time to the allurements and poisonous temptations of the world.

"Why, then, do you take such extraordinary pains to recover her?" asked the pastor, hanging upon this his hope of a warmly cordial and loving welcome in the event of such recovery. It was taxing the misanthrope closely.

"I cannot bear to think of her adrift upon the world. I would provide for her as I have ever done; place her at school, or in kind keeping, where I shall know she is happy and content—because improving her acquaintance with the world and society, begun thus auspiciously."

Without regarding the irony, the pastor added,—

"In other words, you would retain possession, while debarring her from convincing you of her innocence, her unchanged love, her tender childhood? Very wrong, my friend!"

"The 'possession,' as you prefer to put it, is mine to-day, another's to-morrow, and for all I know, a change each day, so long as that 'innocent' and 'unchanged love' you speak of may be prettily assumed! Oh, sweet sex, sweet sex!"

With a horrible moan, St. Aubyn covered his face with his hands.

Mr. Arden was much shocked. He admitted that his friend was aggrieved, but this sweeping lament, so bitter and vindictive, pained the kind mediator exceedingly.

"I have confidence in Lena," he said; "allow her to come

to the parsonage, until you are wiser, calmer, more just?" He added sadly, and with much feeling: "You will know where she is, can see her when you wish, receive her back when welcome. I love the child as I might have loved a daughter of mine own."

The words set the sufferer quivering again; he was thinking of Willie. "No," he said, with a shudder, "I thank you, my friend, but I think the more remote the better." Then he felt angry with himself for the temporary weakness; but love does not die out so quickly; its tendrils are tenacious of their hold when strengthened by ten years' growth.

To the benignant pastor, life was an open scroll, Truth its text, Trust its end, with compassion always fast twined with forbearance, and Forgiveness the fruit of our holiest endeavour. "We are so erring ourselves," he used to think, "so sinning, our whole time should be devoted to the forgiving of others." When he would remark in this wise to St. Aubyn, the latter's caustic rejoinder would stay prolongation of the argument. "Indiscriminate forgiveness," St. Aubyn would remark, "like indiscriminate love, is an infirmity; certain wrongs are beyond all forgiveness."

"Foremost of which is the injury from desertion, eh?"

"Foremost."

Then the pastor would be silent, the mild, kind countenance becoming very thoughtful. Sometimes the old man would remonstrate with his friend upon the futility of sitting down to brood over his grief, and would press the benefit of arousing and bestirring oneself when over-weighted with trouble. He would murmur,—

> "Weep if thou wilt, but weep not thou too long;
> Or weep and work, for work will lead to song.
> Work on. One day, beyond all thoughts of praise,
> A sunny joy will crown thy head with rays;"

but his friend would smile sadly and incredulously. "Have not I told you that I fled even to the East when my last blow fell? But I found no freedom there! Work is a sovereign remedy, but forgetfulness alone brings permanent relief. I must bury myself in my books."

And he buried himself in his books. All the persevering by-play of his guest, or the thoughtful attention of Lena's companion, could not woo him from those. But be sure he suffered all the more for it. He was generally alone in his private apartment, though sometimes in the evening he joined the ladies in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Vincent's stay was drawing to its close; she said she had but left home for a day or two. Her brief view of the position had impressed her with two convictions—first, that this Brandon, whom she had commenced by despising considerably, was an opponent more than worthy for her to enter the lists with; next, that Lord Lindon had changed for the worse. A recluse-life had wrought its usual evil effect; the man was impervious to blandishment. She had one consolation, and rested upon it with content—the child had not been recovered, had not returned. As for Mrs. Brandon—"Well, if his lordship is fool enough," thought the widow, who never minced matters when communing with herself, "so let him!" but she honestly would have given her rival very little for her chance. Nevertheless, in this feline duel the black and white lady possessed an immense advantage; she was aware of it, and the consciousness fed her quiet decorum.

It was a matter of never-ceasing self-congratulation with Mrs. Brandon also, that the child had been heard of no more. "Yes," she thought, "Lena St. Aubyn is wiped off beautifully!" But there was the curious disappearance of Martha Saxe upon that same memorable day, and this perplexed and worried the black and white lady acutely. And sometimes she thought of the original of the portrait within her locket, and she would say to herself, "What's *he* up to, I wonder? Mischief though, or he wouldn't be so quiet." Thus she grew painfully expectant and alert; and divided her time in attending to St. Aubyn, and finessing with Mrs. Vincent.

Five o'clock tea was over, the ladies were at work, St. Aubyn's hound was couched before the fire; warm winter curtains were drawn close. It was a scene of peace and comfort strangely in contrast with the howling winds without, tumultuously besetting the craggy steep as though they

would hurl the towering cliff into the depth of seething waters.

Mrs. Vincent gave a little shuddering glance over at the rattling casement.

"What a horrible place this must be in winter! I would as soon live in a lighthouse!"

"We didn't notice it, when all together, united and happy; the elements had no power to dismay or affright us. There is so much, dear, in being supported by loving companionship!"

And the women smiled sweetly upon one another, while clutching at their work with a motion suggestive of sharpening the claws. Their talk was carried on in a low tone, for the master, as usual, was reading; but he heard, as it was intended he should, and his brows contracted, his teeth met, and the breathing became a process of difficulty.

"A terrible evening to be out of doors! I trust all in whom we are interested are as safely housed and luxuriously comfortable as ourselves!"

"You are thinking of—"

"Of my son, now staying in town, pursuing his studies."

The other purred, playfully patted a ball of wool, looked green and grim and ghastly out from the watchful eyes, and asked,—

"Do you mind holding this skein while I unwind, dear? I am so close upon an entanglement!"

"Not at all; so pleased, dear! Charming colour! You are partial to yellow?"

The other bit her lip and unwound a little quicker, variegated wools, a warm-coloured hank standing out upon the black and white, until from the other end of the room she must have shown tortoiseshell.

They had both been thinking of the child, and would both have rejoiced at her downfall from the cliff.

How intently he seemed absorbed in his book, never lifting his face from the page, its handsome perfection seemed marred by the firm-set purpose and legible pain! He too could be cruel; ay, cruel; he felt the steel within his very

soul. The finer inner life, that mystery and majesty of the human race, with longing desire for more perfect peace, and endless yearning for the higher, was beautiful as, when a boy, he sat lonely beneath the oaks of Lindon, and gave himself to reverie and created an ideal never to be found, it seemed, this side the grave. When he had settled in this house it was to rest upon rock, and to abandon the pursuit of shadows; and here he had been nurturing a dreamy, dangerous ideality, having no substantial essence, baneful as a narcotic, with a great awakening pain. And was he not wise enough to know that the intangible, the mystical dreams which the soul of the sensitively cultured embraces so readily, are but *ignes fatui* by the higher discipline of the teaching compressed within these shattering disappointments? Be that as it may, he was morbidly changed, morose, cynical, doubting. What will release him from this lethargy of pain, this torpor of overwhelmed endurance? What will arouse the spirit burdened down by all this trouble?

Suddenly a ringing of the bell of the great court-yard gate caused the inmates of the apartment to start and look at one another.

With perfect self-possession, Mrs. Brandon, sweetly asking her fair assistant to hold the wool a few minutes, arose and left them. There was an embarrassing silence, an interval of painful suspense.

Once having quitted the drawing-room, Mrs. Brandon drew herself erect, and swiftly crossed the hall. She overtook a servant leisurely upon the way to discover the cause of the summons.

"I will go. It is a poor woman selling lace, I believe."

The servant was glad to return to the great fire in their own room, and gave place to the lady.

She crossed the court-yard, tying a pocket-handkerchief round her head, and it framed in a face more than usually ghastly.

It was gusty and blustering, and a few flakes of snow whitened the flags and upper ledges of the gate. There were crevices through which she could reconnoitre, and she did so.

Blown upon, grey, stone-like, yet splendid, so fair was the face with the light of its honesty, Martha Saxe stood waiting admission. No other figure was to be seen, only that resolute, enduring woman. But Hortense Brandon was not going to allow her to enter there if she could prevent it. Even though the nearest house was miles off, and the desolate, wintry way was unutterably dreary. With a determination the observer would not have given this quiet woman the credit of possessing, she untwisted at a junction the wire of the bell, and left it hanging as though broken by the force with which it had been pulled from without. Mrs. Brandon was not scrupulous when at extremes.

She returned noiselessly to the drawing-room and to her chair, winding on, with the remark to her lady friend holding the wool with particular care,—

"Some tramp; it is dangerous permitting the servants to open the gate after dusk."

The hound stretched itself, turned round, and couched before the fire; moved uneasily, then trotted over to its master, laying its head upon his knee, and looking in his face.

Wearily the student looked down in the large expressive eyes; their strange wistfulness struck him, it was almost a human expression. He shivered slightly; he was not superstitious, but—his darling had loved the dog; a love returned.

"Come, Ponto!" called Mrs. Brandon, "Good dog; does he trouble you, sir?"

"No, thanks, never mind. Is it snowing, Mrs. Brandon, or what sort of a night is it?"

"Bitterly cold, sir; it has commenced to snow."

And he was cold as though out in it. *She* had been wont to love watching for the first to fall upon their garden.

He strode moodily from the room. To that chamber so pleasant in summer, which had deep glass doors opening to the garden. He seldom came here now, it was so redolent of memories of her.

Locking the door by which he entered, he, scarcely thinking of his actions, sat down in the accustomed chair, for the first time since her going, and watched the falling snow.

" Kneeling before him, her eyes filled with tears, and words cadenced with sorrow, she implored his forgiveness."—Vol. II. Page 227.

He had no lamp, and preferred the dim, hazy glimmer of the starlight through the snow. What though this room was shadowy? So were his hopes; so was his life!

With a throbbing brow and quick-beating pulse, he saw the garden paths and lawn, growing white beneath the still descent. He could scarcely breathe, the room had been closed for some days, and he crossed to the window and opened it; the cool air revived him, and he returned to his seat.

It was a dreamy, soothing process, watching the fall of the snow, and he began fancying all sorts of things, even that Lena flitted past the end of the path nearest the wall; and he smiled bitterly while chiding this fancy, foolish and insensate, for ever dwelling upon her. Yet the figure had appeared real enough, so distempered was his imagination.

Stay! There it was again; closer; by the window; a hand on it; and the man scarcely moved, so transfixed and enchained was he by this sudden appearance.

And she entered, seeing him instantly, in the old place: and thought him sleeping.

She knelt by him, winding her arms about him, and tremulous with joy at finding him alone: happy now she was once more at home again.

She kissed him with marvellous warmth, and it burnt him, writhing under her caresses; for, with instant agony of the jealous, he pictured the lessons she had received in the art, the experience she had acquired in the days of her absence. And she was dismayed to find herself put from him, while with chilling sternness he reproved the endearment.

"No, Lena! Save such demonstration of affection for the friends you have left, to return to your quiet dull home."

At that, kneeling before him, her eyes filled with tears, and words cadenced with sorrow, she implored his forgiveness.

"My poor girl!" said he, with some show of tenderness, "You have but proved your claim to be ranked with your loyal sex. Why should I have supposed it possible for you to be different, whatever the measure of precaution taken? However, I am pleased to see you well, and back again; the majority would not have returned at all."

He was speaking collectedly, albeit very strangely: the tone seemed to freeze her. Longing for some extension of forgiveness and affection, she clasped her hands upon his knees, bowing her face, tears fast falling, sobs racking the slight form, and almost killing the inexorable one to whom she appealed.

"Come, come, do not cry like this; let me hear the story of your adventures! Whom—whom you have seen? Where you have been? How used, and why returned?"

And the sobbing explanation came, he never moving: thanks to the dim light, she did not see his face:—

"After you had left, Mrs. Brandon assisted me to go, and I rode in a waggon until I came to a railway station, and from there took the train to London; every one was very kind to me. It was in the evening when I reached London, and I walked about until I was in a street called Regent Street, where I stood watching the lords and the ladies, and then went on to a square, and was standing by the gates of a palace, watching the nobility enter, when I addressed a gentleman hurrying by, asking him if I could anyhow see the lords and ladies, and he said 'Certainly, at his house, many were coming!' And he took me there; but I did not stay very long, and he went with me to a French hotel and hired an apartment for my use that night, and, leaving me, returned home. I could not stop there for the noise, but walked out, and was out all night, passing the time in Covent Garden. It was all new and strange, and I would not have cared if you had been with me, dear! But you were not; still I made the best of it. I became very weary, longing to be at home. In the morning some man procured me a cab, and I was driven through London on the road for home, intending to walk until coming to a small station, for I was afraid of the large ones in London. I was very hungry, and, seeing a beautiful boy standing by a gate, I was going to ask him if he could tell me where I could get some luncheon, when he invited me into a cottage near by, where a friend of his, named Lord Ellerby, received me very kindly; and there I stayed until last night, when I was frightened by a woman entering my bedroom and throwing her arms about me while she kissed me nearly to death; it was dear old Martha Saxe,

who had been searching for me ever since the day I went, and had found me at last, and it is she who has brought me back. But the bell broke, we could make no one hear, and I finished by clambering over the wall."

She ceased; there was oppressive stillness. The narration had been as bad and worse than in his most disturbing moods he had dared to imagine: her simplicity and innocence heightened this very effect. He was paralyzed for a time, could literally pass no remark; but he drew himself away from her, and that was answer enough! Then she sank to the ground, still crying.

"Where is Martha Saxe?" he inquired, in a coldly abrupt tone.

"Outside the gate still, and she said she would rather wait there till morning than get over the wall, knowing your objection to that method of entrance."

He shuddered, remembering the day of the man Beech's appearance.

Then, raising her, he placed the trembling culprit before him, between the chair of justice and the wintry scene without, so typical now of his life. He spoke, hoarsely, and with such pain it thrilled even her.

"You have made your choice, Lena, and will abide by it. You are welcome to occupy, to-night, the chamber long looked upon as yours; in the morning I must make some other arrangement. With all my love, which passes telling by words, I cannot receive you back again; it would be constant pain to me, and I cannot live in such continuous martyrdom. You have not known how I have loved you, but be this its proof, that, loving you still unutterably, I can thus put you from me!"

She had anticipated indignation, reproaches, perhaps anger of a majestic kind that pardons while it reproves, but was unprepared for this torrent of chilling, sorrowing, immutable displeasure. She had been in the wrong, had been very naughty, had wounded him with thoughtless impulsiveness, and she repented sorely, but she could nohow see why, if he loved her, he should not forgive; particularly after she had

told him all the truth, keeping nothing back, kneeling at his feet imploring forgiveness, and weeping as she had never wept before. Her spirit began to rise; by her creed Love forgives anything. It was natural she would not take his view of the situation.

So she stood with fingers interlaced, waiting; he was looking out upon the garden.

"Perhaps," he said, "you would rather go to your room unobserved by the servants; in the morning please come down as usual, and as though nothing had happened. I will acquaint you with my wishes in the course of the day. Good night."

She was glad of permission to retire, and moved a step towards the door, but then, acting upon an impulse she could not restrain, she returned to him, stood by his side, and—

"Kiss me dear! *One!* I've not forgotten you for a minute, and would have come back the very next day could I have done so! Not one kiss? You are not the same, it is no longer like home!" And with a little moan she fell back, for he was unyielding as a figure of iron. She felt it bitterly and resented it; there seemed so harsh a rigour about this treatment of *her*, accustomed to the homage princesses claim.

She went from the room, and he, the instant she was gone, relaxed, and fell upon the couch in a brief interval of such keen agony that consciousness itself well-nigh departed. He had acted as he had determined, but what an awful struggle it was, with the great hunger to take her to his heart! Oh, he could be cruel! He had been cruel! She thought him cruel, and it added to his agony. Done in that chamber sacred by its love and tenderness, old acts of solicitous holy care making it a retreat angels might have winged their bright presence unto! All the lovely associations seemed to rise against the profanation and add to the burden of his woe.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIRTUE IS ITS OWN REWARD.

CROUCHING by her master's gateway, with the stubborn, immovable faithfulness which characterized her, Martha Saxe had apparently taken up her quarters for the night. Wind might blow and snow might fall, but her back was against the door of home, and the child was safely housed! She could die upon the strength of that.

The snow fell thick, and she watched it accumulating upon the trees, covering them as with lace. Her old friends, the stars, were there also; and she felt a strange peacefulness at having accomplished her purpose, and at being once more at home. It never struck her as thoughtless that Lena did not rush to the gate and admit her; she was simply and entirely content—and there is no bettering that.

But presently she heard the master's step—how well she knew it! He was coming with his own hand to admit her, perhaps out of gratitude; and pleasant anticipation kindled new warmth within her heart as she sprang to her feet.

But with what strange words, and in how cold a tone he spoke! So unlike him! "Master is not well," she thought to herself; "he has been fretting for her."

"Is Martha Saxe there, and alone?"

"Yes, Mr. St. Aubyn, and alone, sir!"

The gate was opened, and master and servant stood face to face beneath the snowy portals. She thought he looked dreadfully ill, yet more dignified. He bowed kindly, and thanked her sincerely for the service she had rendered. He asked her to follow him to his study, and she did so, tremulous

now that it was all over. Sitting at his table, while unlocking a small drawer, he thus spoke,—

"The service you have rendered me, Mrs. Saxe, is one that no money and no words ever can repay; but I had previously offered a reward of a thousand pounds to whoever brought back to my guardianship your young mistress, and this I have pleasure in now handing to you. It is poor acknowledgment for your devotion; but any request you may ask of me now or at a future time shall be granted, no matter what its nature or extent. Until then hold me your debtor and most grateful friend. Thanks; that will do."

She was so overcome by his generosity and gracious conduct that she scarcely knew what course to take, but with a deep courtesy, uttering her broken thanks, she retired.

Then he rang for his servant.

"Send Mrs. Brandon to me."

The lady entered quietly, and walked to the study-table, appearing as unmoved as usual.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"To say I shall not require your services after this evening: suit your own convenience in arranging the hour to-morrow for your departure. This note will settle the little account between us."

Elbow upon table, hand to his brow, the instant he had spoken he apparently resumed his reading, upon which he seemed engaged when she entered.

"This is a singular proceeding, Mr. St. Aubyn!" carefully placing the bank-note in her purse; "I hope every one may prove as faithful to you as I have been." It stung him, but he betrayed no impression, and she retired as quietly as she had entered.

"Bowled out after all!" said the lady elegantly to herself, returning to the drawing-room. The study-bell was again heard, and almost immediately the servant appeared to say that Mr. St. Aubyn wished to speak with Mrs. Vincent in the study.

"What's the matter, I wonder?" murmured the widow to herself, as she darted a quick and searching glance at the not particularly pleasant face of her dear friend, Mrs. Brandon.

Mr. St. Aubyn was still reading; he looked up wearily; she saw he was suffering acutely.

"Take a chair a moment or two, Anna. I will not detain you long, for I am not well to-night."

She did so, taking care gracefully to arrange the folds of her dress while sitting down. He did not speak for a minute or two, and she gave a little pull at the black velvet bow upon her wrist, which was limp at the loop. He fidgeted with the leaf of the book and was restless; she softly smoothed her hair above the brow. One of his feet darted out under the table as impelled by a twinge of pain he could not control; she carefully, lightly—a mere butterfly pass, wiped the corner of her mouth with the corner of her pocket-handkerchief, leaving the antipodal angle with *Anna* in fancy embroidery and a mock crest full in his view, if he happened to look her way after one of his spasmodic movements. She wondered what was coming—it might be something worth waiting for.

"Lena has returned."

She opened her eyes at that. "It will relieve you of much anxiety."

"Yes. I was very anxious. I am now pondering upon where to place her; I am not fond of schools."

She caught at her opportunity in an instant. "No, you would not be. The child needs a quiet, kind home, presided over by a motherly, yet accomplished, woman, who, although guardian and companion, would likewise be an instructor."

"Exactly, just what I was thinking, my friend; the difficulty is to find such a home."

"Would you feel disposed to entrust me with the care of your *protégée?* I shall be happy to oblige you in any way, and it will be society for myself now that my son is studying in London. We are very quiet—only myself and the maid, and no visitors."

"Really, I do not know how to thank you enough; you have taken a great burden of embarrassment from my mind. You will not feel hurt if I ask you to curtail your stay here? I do not wish Lena to resume her old occupations about the place; I could not, perhaps, part with her!" with a terrible

sigh. "Some time to-morrow—early to-morrow—early as convenient to you—"

"Certainly, with pleasure; my time has almost expired, it will but make a difference of a few hours, and this is nothing to the pleasure of serving you. One of the maids shall assist me to pack this very night, and your man can go over early and order a conveyance to be at the foot of the Cliff, so that we might, if you are agreeable, start directly after breakfast."

"You are very good; I will not forget this kind sympathy."

"I don't think you will," said the lady to herself; then aloud, with her sweetest smile,—

"You know it has always given me happiness to serve you. But I will not speak of this; you have met with so much that is false in life, I can well understand how instantly the heart recognizes the truthful."

"Alas! it has been on all sides of me of late years. I think, Anna, when a man loses his mother, from that time devotion, truth, and loyalty have perished in this world for him."

"And yet how different should be your conviction. One genuine woman of all the world, a tender helpmeet, a refined and cultured lady, your equal in thought, your loving disciple in taste, the delicate ministrant to your sympathies; how would one such reverse your judgment upon her sex! Good night, good night."

CHAPTER XX.

"TOWARDS RESTORING THE CHURCH."

PISGAH TABERNACLE was a plain, white-fronted edifice, the face of which sadly wanted washing. Within, although resembling a sepulchre, it could not by any stretch of the imagination be likened to a "whited" one. The tabernacle wanted doing up. Mr. Jones had no objection to its being done up, if the people would pay for it. But the people were poor, the Rev. Jacob Jones was poor, and the tabernacle remained unclean. It was situated in a by-street, in an unfashionable quarter, with a network of impoverished labour surrounding it; and an attractive church—Ritualistic—close by, so that altogether the tabernacle had a bad time of it.

Then the brilliant idea of having an additional collecting-box just inside the door, was started by a deacon of wondrous originality. At that time the three boxes were inscribed, CHURCH EXPENSES: WEEKLY OFFERING: and ORGAN FUND. A new box was procured; it became necessary to paint the object thereon, and Mr. Wriggle, the deacon, had selected DONATIONS TOWARDS THE CLEANSING, as an appropriate inscription. This was overruled by the Rev. Mr. Jones, who wisely thought the people would get outside before they had time to read the string of titles, and decide which to support. It was, therefore, abandoned, and this expressive appeal substituted :— TOWARDS RESTORING THE BUILDING.

Six months passed, during which Pisgah Tabernacle became several degrees dirtier. Then it was proposed that the "Restoration Box" should be opened, and seven farthings were

disinterred. It was very evident the Pisgah congregation could not support everything. Mr. Jones was not, however, a gentleman to be discouraged; he had been used to this sort of thing all his life. He had doubled the members of his church, and that was infinitely of more importance than cleaning down the building. Still the pastor thought a little spurring would not be amiss, and wrote to ask the new clergyman recently settled at the large church on the hill if he would kindly preach for him one Sunday at his convenience. Dr. Cricket was willing enough to help a struggling brother, but, as a point of etiquette, handed the letter to his deacons, before writing a courteous assent. These enlightened gentlemen, however, were of opinion it would not do at all. It was highly necessary the doctor should preserve position. The announcement of his going to preach in Mr. Jones's pokey little place would excite much attention, would cause great talk, and the rest. Nevertheless Dr. Cricket wrote his brother a very polite note, wishing him prosperity in his ministry, and invoking a blessing upon his work. This was cheap. Mr. Jones felt it, but inasmuch as a public man may not show all he feels, he placed the letter aside, to forget it as quickly as possible, but with an inward determination that the Cricket should never at any future time be heard upon his hearth.

Mr. Jones knew equally with his secular friends that every man has to hold a candle to the devil. Mr. Jones knew that the lesser preacher has to hold the candle to a good many. If this knowledge was distasteful to the reverend gentleman, he yet performed the ceremony perseveringly, and with conscientious regard for the welfare of his church.

Many rebuffs did the pastor meet with, and of a more unpleasant nature than that at the hands of Dr. Cricket; but he toiled on with honest and pious industry, thinking now and then that the more prosperous ones of his sect might help; but not repining over-much, for his little church was filled, although with those who did not give.

One Sunday after service Miss Kitty Ticklewich, tripping from the organ-gallery, saw the pastor walking down the centre aisle. "Just catch him," said Miss Kitty, with her juvenile

and artless playfulness; and so she did, at foot of the gallery stairs. He looked pale from the fatigue of conducting the long service. He shrank a little at sight of the rippling member of his choir. He tried to shirk it, but it was no use, he knew that the sirens who sought to undo St. Anthony had been at it ever since. He would have made good a retreat, but there was no outlet, so he looked kindly upon the maiden, extending his hand.

"How do you do, Miss Ticklewich? Quite well, I hope?"

"La! Mr. Jones, you know I'm never ailing!" He did, to his cost.

"This is a glorious morning; fine weather makes all the difference in our attendance!"

"What a beautiful sermon you gave us this morning, sir! Do you know" (with her most guileless cast below the sand-coloured hair), "it has made me resolve to be *so* good!" She was looking out of the corners of her eyes, tips of her fingers meeting pleadingly over the hymn-book she was bearing homewards.

"I am very pleased, I'm sure, if any poor words of mine—"

"Not poor, Mr. Jones, dear Mr. Jones, I must say so, for having brought me to this way of thinking. Ah!" (with a heavy sigh) "what a life is yours, so lofty, so full of single devotedness!" The pastor recoiled a step.

"I do my best, Miss Ticklewich, no more, with the strength given me. My scope, as you know, is narrow; I often feel I want breathing room. Our chapel is sorely dilapidated. I had hoped before this to have set about its restoration, but friends seem backward, co-operators half-hearted, and thus the project lingers. However, it's no use looking upon the dark side. The old place having stood all these years will stand a long time yet, but it grieves a pastor to see the house of prayer month after month wanting a few repairs which a dozen with their shoulders to the wheel would soon see executed."

"Why don't you ask the famous preacher to help you?"

"I wrote to the doctor quite recently; but his engagements, he was sorry to say, prevented his acceding to my request."

"Bother the doctor!" cried Kitty Ticklewich wickedly, "I mean Mr. Garland!"

The pastor of Pisgah Tabernacle appeared properly shocked.

"Do you know what you are saying, Miss Ticklewich? Are you aware of the bitter scorn with which one in my position is looked upon by the Church of England? How much more would this be the case with this idol of fashion having one of the largest congregations in the kingdom?"

"Rubbish! You entertain wrong notions of him. Go and call upon him, and he will assist us."

"No, Miss Ticklewich; principle forbids. I should not think it right."

"Well, shall I call for you, and tell him the truth?"

"I should say not! But I cannot, of course, control your actions."

"I am very silly sometimes," said Miss Kitty simply, "and they do indeed need controlling." The pastor thought so.

They parted, the old chapel-keeper wanting to lock the doors, and Mr. Jones objecting to talk in the street.

On the following day Miss Ticklewich called at Mr. Garland's, and was admitted to his presence without any ceremony.

The Minister heard her artless tale through with kind attention.

"Now," concluded Miss Ticklewich, with delightful candour, "it is, I know, an unusual thing for a clergyman of the Established Church to be appealed to for sympathy with a Nonconformist preacher, but I believe you are broadly charitable, and not biassed by sect. Our own people cannot help, our Denominational friends will not, the general public stand aloof, indifferent, and so we may go on to the day of doom. Our pastor has been to the people who subscribe to this, that, and the other, and got nothing out of them, owing, I suppose, to its being a chapel in an out-of-the-way district, and there being no subscription-list. He has written to people of position, to tradesmen of wealth, and to those at a distance; a beggarly thirty shillings being the result. This wears down a man and sickens him. We can't get up a Bazaar, because

"The minister heard her artless tale through with kind attention."—Page 238.

our people haven't time to make things, and haven't money to buy materials. Mr. Jones wrote to some ladies, and they would have felt 'charmed to comply with his request, but'—mark the 'but,' Mr. Garland, please—'they were occupied upon preparing for the large Bazaar at the Dome in November.' Thus, up in the corner, as you may say, the idea occurred to me that you might assist us, and I mentioned this to Mr. Jones, who seemed outraged by the bare notion. Now I don't see things in that light, beggars mustn't be choosers, and poor pride is ignorance. So I determined to call upon you myself, and, begging your pardon for the liberty, I hope you're not offended. It's no distant missions nor trumped-up charity I'm pleading for, but a place of worship under one's very nose, and in the very centre of a necessitous neighbourhood."

Miss Ticklewich did plead in her most sweetly persuasive manner. Whatever he might have thought, the Minister displayed no annoyance at the lady's audacious and vulgar, yet good-natured, efforts in behalf of her struggling little church.

"And what is the large sum necessary, Miss Ticklewich, for the restoration?"

"We think thirty-five pounds would do it thoroughly, sir!" replied the lady, quivering with delight, for by the kind expression she believed her errand was about to prove a successful one. But Mr. Garland, who thought as much of his poorer brother's feelings as of his own, would not wound that other's sensitiveness in this way.

"And very sincerely do I trust you may be saved from the disappointment of feeling the amount cannot be raised. I am sure you will excuse me, knowing the many calls upon my purse, if I do not express my sympathy in a more practical and immediate manner."

Miss Ticklewich rose.

"Do I understand you are not going to do anything for us? Well! I should never have believed it of you, sir!"

The Minister smiled with great kindness. "I am sorry to dispel any roseate illusion you had formed concerning my power and inclination to help others, Miss Ticklewich!"

"Put not your faith in princes!" murmured the lady, with

plaintive sweetness. "Man, man! Alas! all flesh is grass!" and with inexpressible sadness Miss Ticklewich departed. Her idol was lowered from its pedestal, was mere breakable clay after all, was cracking fast! And the incensed spinster trotted over to her friend, Miss Caddie, to have a fling at it, and hear the news while lunching.

After she had gone, the Minister, with exquisite forethought, sent on a sealed, unaddressed envelope to his housekeeper in town, with it a slip requesting her to address it according to the direction given therewith, and post it in London. The envelope contained a bank-note for fifty pounds, enclosed in a sheet of letter paper with this explanation, "*Towards restoring Mr. Jones's church, with a friend's kind wishes for his extended success in the ministry.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR HORACE'S SECRET IS DISCOVERED.

THE honoured aunts of Sir Horace Vivian set their adventurous minds upon riding in the Park. It was the morning following that day the incidents of which have been described. It was upon thirteen well-trained steeds the goddesses elected to make their advent at the fashionable meet.

Sir Horace attempted faint dissuasion, which was emphatically overruled.

"We know you are not fond of horseback, Horace, but for once you must surrender to our pleasure. Other girls ride, why not we? I beg to tell you, when your aunts were young—er—hem—younger, they rode like—like—"

"Centauresses!" suggested Sir Horace; which greatly pained his relatives.

"No, nephew; like those aerial spirits who guided the chariot of the sun. We have not forgotten, I hope, our skilful management of the beautiful equine animal."

It resulted in Sir Horace going to the livery-stables, and there arranging for the morning's use of the fourteen most tractable animals the stables could supply.

These formed a truly imposing procession, to the great delight of the urchins, who followed as perseveringly as when some Circus parades the principal streets of a town.

An oak settee from the hall served for a stepping-stone. Aunt Penelope was the first to mount, and had only just acquainted her nephew that she felt like Queen Elizabeth, when she capsized, and, had it not been for her clinging to the neck of her steed, she must have fallen to the ground. The little

boys set up a shout, which the aunts instantly suppressed by turning the full force of their Medusa glare upon the offenders.

The graceful cavalcade was quickly formed in line, a crowd of domestics' caps appearing at the windows of three sides of the square.

They were just ready for the start, and their steeds were champing and rearing with impatience, when Aunt Dido remembered that riding always made her feel faint, and a basket of sandwiches, a seed cake, and a bottle of home-made wine and water had to be fixed upon the saddle of the obliging Sir Horace, who tenderly hoped that this expedition would effectually deliver an overridden world of his aunts.

Then they set forth; some rude juvenile of advanced knowledge shouting something about Tam O'Shanter's witches.

We have all heard of the Charge of the Light Brigade. The poor steeds therein have passed into the hackney epoch, but the descent of Sir Horace's party at the crossing forcibly reminded him of the well-known action, for his aunts rode over everything, not from a Hun-like spirit so much as because they could not help it.

"Now, gawky!" called out a desperate-looking female whom Aunt Minerva had almost ridden down, "look where you're a-driving to!"

"Oh, my!" screamed another, "that's a riding-school!"

It was very unpleasant that the public would criticize, but there was nothing to do but submit, and press on for the Park, where ladies upon horses were not objects of unusual comment. They pressed on.

Rotten Row being reached, Sir Horace trusted all annoyance would be at an end; but they had not been there five minutes before he saw the most studiously fastidious of his friends advancing, accompanied by a lady, young and graceful, whom Sir Horace knew to be his recently-wedded wife, to whom he had not yet been introduced. It was embarrassing to a degree. What would the attendant sirens be taken for? There was no avoiding them, and Sir Horace tried to wear a smile of *bonhomie*. He saw the lady draw attention to their

approach, and immediately afterwards look another way. He saw his friend adjust an eyeglass, then drop it pityingly, and coolly as usual, perhaps a little more so. Another instant and they were up with them. It was imperative to speak—must speak to one another; but Sir Horace had no conception what to say, or how to get out of it. His friend spoke first.

"Fine morning—hope you are quite well? Devil of a lot of fine women with you!" and rode on, with an august inclination, his companion looking another way during the interchange of civilities.

They had passed on, Sir Horace biting his lip with mortification. "What fellow," he said to himself, "could wave his hand over a flock like mine and say, 'My aunts!' I verily believe her ladyship suspected Bohemia, and that I was airing one of the Music Halls in the absence of my family."

"Don't you trouble, Horace!" cried Miss Penelope, observing their knight looked vexed. "We didn't want to be introduced! Your fine connexions are not among our wants, but we do like things right and straightforward in the house. As for that woman's nose, it's a pity she didn't hold it a little higher, looking as if all the Park belonged to her, steering along for all the world like the figure-head of a ship! Some ladies' maid exalted in station, I'll be bound. Save us from want o' charity, but anybody could see what she was! Now, girls—"

Highly indignant, Miss Penelope spurred forward, closely followed by the battalion.

There seemed an unusual number of nice people about that day, and Sir Horace and party were honoured with no small share of attention. His friends looked coldly upon the cavalcade as though upon a procession of nightmares.

They returned home, the ladies very fatigued, and Miss Dido exceedingly faint.

The servants arrived later, when an immediate diversion ensued, Miss Penelope considering it her emphatic duty to cross-question them upon where they had been, and whom they had been with. Then she came in to Sir Horace.

"Don't you trouble, nephew; but with such a lot of servants as you have about you, the place is going to rack and ruin as fast as ever it can. I never came near such an impertinent set, never! But I hope to work a radical change, if only for our poor dear Marion's sake, whom we hope soon to have with us now. As a beginning, I've told one of the maids to pile all the table-linen on the dresser, just to see what you have and what you have not, for I declare you don't know: the tray-cloths and table-napkins kicking about that kitchen would make a saint weep! It is well we came as we did, for upon my word there is *no* management!"

"It seems you quite ignore my eldest daughter's position in the house, as well as that of the lady whom I have engaged for the express purpose."

"Yes, we'll soon settle *her!* We've heard quite enough about this precious companion—companion indeed! Yes, I should think so!"

"I may as well say now as when that much-abused person appears, that I shall maintain my authority in my own household in all matters connected with the engaging, retaining, or discharging of those in my employ, and certainly shall not permit any one of them to be insulted either by your officious self or your sisters!"

"Girls! You hear!" shrilly exclaimed their leader; "You hear the preliminary defence of this brazen creature; but it shall not save her from being told the truth! I've no patience with such; eating our nephew out of house and home, while the servants are doing pretty much as they like!"

Later in the afternoon, when his aunts were up to their necks in the choicest of his damask, Sir Horace stole an interview with his little captive.

"Almost tired of being in prison, pretty one?"

"No, I like it; I could stay here for a long, long time yet!"

"Well, you're going to, I hope!"

She smiled archly. "With a *little* more liberty, you mean?"

"It will depend upon how you contrive to prepossess our friend in your favour," said he, with a sly look.

At which a warm glow tinged the child's face. As the time drew near she became tremulous lest any accident should mar their plan. Sir Horace went on to dress for dinner, and while thus engaged his party arrived. It took a long time for all the aunts to kiss or to be kissed by all their nieces, while Lady Vivian somewhat coldly gave her hand in turn to each: so that Sir Horace had time to send down to request the immediate attendance of Mrs. Thompson upstairs. This was done quietly and without attracting observation by the most sensible of Sir Horace's servants, and presently the lady appeared, looking, if anything, the better for the sea voyage, and more delicately pretty than ever.

"I am glad to see you back, madam, although rather earlier than I wished; but no doubt Lady Vivian has explained to you that we are sometimes honoured by—by—"

The lady smiled, and Sir Horace knew she was acquainted with all concerning the terrible infliction. He had now to account for the motive of their strange procedure, and briefly as possible Sir Horace thought it advisable to describe events. This he did, speaking glowingly of his young charge, and admitting her having crept by infinitesimal degrees right into his stupid old heart. She was greatly moved, and with tremulous emotion seemed to hang upon his utterance, with such eager anxiety he would not delay an instant communicating the truth; this he did with the greatest delicacy, showing her at once the retreat where her darling was concealed, rightly judging she would be greatly relieved to retire to its privacy.

His attention was diverted by the approach of the party: his wife, daughters, and aunts, all talking at once and Miss Penelope louder than any of them; their approach being signalled by the confusion of tongues. While they were yet some distance off the sensitive baronet had time to recover himself; and upon their arrival greeted his wife and daughters affectionately, if without demonstrative enthusiasm.

"And now," continued Miss Penelope, resuming the discourse this greeting interrupted, "I have only to say that a female has been, and we believe is, concealed in this house;

we deemed it only proper to communicate with you, and advise your immediate return."

"And now that I have returned, Miss Penelope," said Lady Vivian, with severe stateliness, "allow me to assure you that any accusation you may make against Sir Horace will be treated with the contempt it deserves. I have always had the most implicit confidence in my husband, and the last people who could ever destroy that confidence are yourselves. Your presence in this house is unnecessary, undesired, and unwelcome! I need say no more."

With disdainful majesty Lady Vivian turned from the tribe, as though their very presence was loathsome to her.

"Better go down into the housekeeper's room, I think; I've come over quite sinking!" Thus Aunt Dido to Aunt Phyllis.

"One moment, Marion. We will make good our charge, or perish in the attempt."

Lady Vivian turned to address her husband,—

"You will make arrangements for your relatives' departure, Horace, as quickly as possible?"

"Yes, he'd better!" cried Miss Penelope threateningly. "And this is our reward, is it, for trying to preserve the honour of the family, and hush up what must have proved a public scandal! But, there, some women can submit to anything; and, of course, being away from home so much, you don't take the interest in it one might reasonably expect. We repeat, a female is concealed in this house, and we will not quit it until the minx is discovered!"

"To hasten the former desirable event, my dear aunts, perhaps I can assist the latter!"

"There, girls! You hear him! He actually admits it!" Miss Penelope handed the bon-bon effusion to Marion. "Read it, my love, let us hear what your Mamma thinks of that!" Laughing heartily, Miss Vivian read the ludicrous jingle aloud.

> "Each scandal-loving spinster-maid
> Shall thus of this be made afraid."

"Exactly my sentiments!" said her ladyship, curtly.

"But we want to know how it came in that oak-chest?" asked Aunt Minerva sharply.

"A relic, I should think," merrily cried the youngest Miss Vivian, "of my school-days, when I know I used to store my treasures in so many different places, I often forgot where. I wish I'd one or two young playmates now! I get tired of my big sisters' company sometimes!"

"Well, that's pretty, and affectionate!" exclaimed Miss Iphigenia. "I only wish I was your Ma! My word, but I'd keep you under, young lady!"

"Your interference is not required, Miss Iphigenia!" said her ladyship stiffly.

"And it wasn't offered, ma'am!" replied the other, equally unbending.

Lady Vivian drew herself up haughtily, with a look of unutterable scorn.

"You will permit me to pass?" To Miss Penelope.

"Oh, certainly! It seems you've brought some airs from the Continent, but you can't do it like that woman in the Park!" (Miss Penelope will never forget that woman in the Park.) "And it strikes me even your head will come down when you see what you will see! Girls! girls! To the studio!"

And therewith the fascinating speaker put herself at the head of her troop, and in compact order marched to the door of Sir Horace's *sanctum*. The door was found locked, when, placing her back against it, Miss Penelope stoutly demanded the key. Before Sir Horace could reply there was a slight rustle, and the much abused companion appeared upon the scene. She looked very interesting in her sad garb, and was dressed with much good taste; her manners were quietly collected, and of themselves disarming; a touching softness in the lowered gaze, and so pensive and sweet an expression profiled against the group of ordinary faces there assembled, that the effect was to instantly quell the hubbub. Her actions were watched with cat-like scrutiny as she stood with perfect self-possession before the grim tribunal.

"So you're the new companion, are you?" contemptuously hissed the leading goddess.

Lady Vivian volunteered the reply, "This is my friend, and my daughters' friend!"

"Yes! and your husband's friend, I should think!" Aunt Penelope tossed her curls significantly. Sir Horace was slowly opening the door. "You know we *may* find nothing, for Horace is very deep!"

That gentleman thought he would be deep enough to prevent recurrence of this invasion of the goddesses. The inner door was reached, and Aunt Penelope herself sharply opened it.

There sat the foundling over a book, not in the least disturbed by their entrance, and looking so pretty, the sight alone would have won the hearts of any but the spectral crew who had thus abruptly broken in upon her.

The aunts looked confounded at the discovery, but Miss Penelope, who was unprepared as any of them for it, had the presence of mind to exclaim, "There, girls! What did I tell you?" She looked round with triumph at her followers, craning their necks to obtain a glimpse of the phenomenon. Sir Horace was about to explain, when, to his surprise, Lady Vivian, looking inquiringly at the companion, asked, "The little girl you told me of?" and, going up to the child, kissed her with much kindness. Then the youngest daughter of Sir Horace did the same, commenting affectionately upon the beauty of their little visitor. Holding the child's hand in hers, Mrs. Thompson turned towards the goddesses with this simple key to all the mystery, "My little girl, ladies, kindly taken charge of by Sir Horace, during my absence with his daughters."

The resemblance between mother and daughter was marked; the countenances of the thirteen aunts drooped simultaneously.

"And we shall still be very glad indeed to take charge of her," Sir Horace hastened to add, in order that there should be no mistake, of course after the interchange of meaning and kindly looks between himself and her ladyship.

"I shall drop if I don't have something to take!" Aunt Dido whispered to the dear one nearest her.

But Aunt Penelope's hour had come. She had played out her strategy and was vanquished! The rout of the amazons was complete. Turning indignantly to her force, their leader thus declaimed, "Girls! Darlings! We are of no further use here; nay, more, our company is not appreciated! We will go where true maidenly modesty and chivalrous womanly sympathy touches a kindred chord, and awakens that of the pure and untainted. Girls, we will visit our cousins, the Comdarlingtons, of Brighton! I am only sorry we have remained here so long as we have, for Horace and his wife are downright ungrateful, and don't deserve the interest we have shown."

"Pleasant prospect for the Comdarlingtons!" whispered Sir Horace, while offering his arm to her ladyship. Turning with a graceful inclination of farewell, Lady Vivian thus addressed her husband's relatives at parting,—

"I think it right to tell you, Miss Penelope, that it was not your mischief-making aspersion directed against my husband's honour which brought me back to England; it was simply the knowledge that you were in this house, of itself sufficient to require the immediate presence of its mistress. We shall esteem the relief afforded by your departure, and sincerely hope you will not trouble to come again. If, as I believe, you carry the same want of charity and love of mischief wherever you go, it is certain you must leave one general trail of sorrow and ill."

It came rather hard upon the devoted band, but Aunt Penelope, who had as many lives as a cat, resented it with spirit.

"It shows what you are!" she screamed. "Talking at your husband's relations in that manner; but we beg to inform you, madam, that long before you came interloping into the family we were there, and it will take a better than you to root us out of it. I should like to know where the family would have been by this time, if it had not been for us!" Sir Horace and his lady heard no more; taking the child with them, and accompanied by its mother, they retired to the drawing-room. "I'm very sorry for your poor dear misguided mother, Marion," continued Aunt Penelope to the eldest Miss Vivian;

"we have been thinking of you dear children, acting in your behalf, who have no one to act for you, and are unable to act for yourselves. May you be preserved from the evil effects of such bad example! Poor lambs! poor lambs!"

"Poor wolves! poor wolves!" mimicked the youngest Miss Vivian, who was something of a rogue, while Miss Iphigenia, who overheard it, darted at her playful niece one of her most scathing looks.

Considerable was the commotion incidental to the departure of the force, and it was a pleasing sight when the little conqueror was installed in the very throne usurped by great Aunt Penelope. All embarrassment and worry over, the kind Sir Horace shone in his true colours, and a right courtly and genial gentleman did he appear. Lady Vivian laughed over his ludicrous account of the shifts to which he had been compelled to resort in order to preserve intact "the honour of the family." And Sir Horace laughed over the exceedingly clever plan, as he thought, adopted for extrication from their dilemma; a plan so clever as to be perfectly true. "But never mind," said he good-humouredly, "let those laugh that win, and all's well that ends well!"

Language were too feeble to paint the inward joy and thankfulness of the mother, who had little expected this reward upon her return to London. Thus strangely do things come about! To have her darling with her beneath the same roof, beloved even and made so much of by the family, was more than, in her wildest imagination, she had dared to hope for.

And Sir Horace would have the child with him constantly, and, it is not too much to say, was amply rewarded for his earlier contest in her behalf. "I don't know who is kindest to my little girl," the grateful mother would say, "yourself, her ladyship, or the dear young ladies." Mrs. Travers had only disclosed so much of her history as would enlist the sympathy of the kind-hearted family; but they detected the birth and recognized the gentle breeding, while loving her for the sweet amiability, her chief characteristic.

"I understand from the little girl that your poor husband used to write, ma'am; was a scholar in short; and being like

myself, a lover of books, I apprehend he devoted the greater part of his time to literature?" This was the only allusion ever made to Lionel, and noticing that the subject was too affecting for the lady to converse upon, Sir Horace did not again recur to it. He troubled himself about nothing; he had escaped from the locusts, and had secured his foundling; he was simply satisfied. And his satisfaction took the form of visiting his Club less and staying at home more. "Owing to my return," thought Lady Vivian complacently, and general harmony prevailed. The child was very fond of him, and it was her delight to pass her time in the library or study; flattered by this attachment, Sir Horace would find even more than usual in one or other of the rooms to engage his attention. "And as I grow greyer," he thought, "she will grow fairer, with all the bloom of stately girlhood making a poem of her years; and then will come the day when she will elect a younger hero upon whom to bestow attachment, one with brighter eye, more even teeth, and whiter hand; with a head clustered thick about with darker curls, and ways which woo and win. Ah, well! So true it is, one comes to love young life the more, the wider seems the span!"

One day Sir Horace received a short note and present from his dear Aunt Penelope. The note ran,—

Dear Nephew,

Accept the enclosed from your sorrowing aunts, who yet hope to see that Bathsheba destroyed.

PENELOPE.

The present was a perforated-card or book-marker, whereon was worded in scarlet silk this classical quotation from the poet,—

"There is no strange handwriting on the wall,
Thro' all the midnight hum no threatening call,
Nor on the marble floor the stealthy fall
Of fatal footsteps. All is safe. Thou fool,
The avenging deities are shod with wool."

W. ALLEN BUTLER.

"Complimentary!" was Sir Horace's brief comment. But he acknowledged his aunt's thoughtful little present, thus:—

Dear Aunt,

Thanks for quotation. Accept enclosed in return, from your still unreformed yet dutiful

HORACE.

A plain glazed card of Lady Vivian's, whereon, in the neatest of caligraphy, this double inscript:—

"*If Parliament were to consider the sporting with reputation of as much importance as sporting on manors, and pass an act for the preservation of fame, there are many who would thank them for the bill.*"

SHERIDAN.

"*To hear an open slander is a curse;*
But not to find an answer is a worse."—OVID.

And there was no reply received to this.

CHAPTER XXII.

'WALTER' IS RECAPTURED.

When, the morning following the flight of Lena from the home of Lord Ellerby, that mysterious event was brought to light, his lordship, shrugging his shoulders disgustedly, merely observed, "Well, I do think that young person the most singular being I have ever had to do with!" and dismissed it, bestowing more attention upon his charming pupil.

Lord Ellerby was excessively annoyed, but he never permitted these commonplace ailments to become apparent or to annoy him long, and he appeared pretty indifferent. Not so 'Walter,' whose interest, sympathy, and love clung tenaciously to the runaway maiden. 'Walter' could not account for this strong prepossession; there it was, and she could not forget it, and even Lorry's company failed to erase the strong impression. The erratic young fugitive was indeed sorely missed by the three. 'Walter' felt to some extent wounded; they had been even as sisters, and she thought her companion might at least have told her of any scheme she had in contemplation. This, 'Walter' believed to be the pursuit of her journey. She had so many times spoken anxiously of St. Aubyn; and then 'Walter' recalled her own words with a pang, and took it to heart that these might have been instrumental in causing her friend sudden alarm. All this disturbed sensitive 'Walter,' and after Lorry's return to his Art-master at Kensington, in company with Lord Ellerby, she set forth on a long walk to try and find her friend, having apprised his lordship of her intention before he departed on his drive. He saw no objection, and playfully remarked, "Don't you run away from me

as well!" and drove on. Lorry's last words were, "Do take care of yourself for my sake; and—I would go on to Mr. Percival's as quickly as possible, I am sure they will be very kind to you." 'Walter' had told her boy-friend all; and she thought his advice was good, and meant to act upon it shortly. Meantime she went on her walk. It occurred to her that Lena would in all probability go on to St. Alban's. She had mentioned the town, and said she was proceeding there when she encountered 'Walter,' who followed that direction, feeling she could rest content if only with a good-bye kiss.

Now, all unknown to the child, and just without the town, was encamped the equestrian establishment that had passed her some nights previously upon the road. The large tent had been erected in a field known as the Fair Field, and around it were collected the cars and chariots which had rendered the one o'clock procession through the streets of St. Alban's a spectacle for gaping wonder. A flag floated from the summit of the central pole, whereon the natives of Hertfordshire read Ringdom and Tanner. It was the afternoon performance, and the place was packed with a motley crowd, and judging from the screams of laughter, the circus gave every satisfaction. It must be confessed in the case of Ringdom and Tanner's Circus the horses were not the strongest point; the stereotyped **80** would have required looking for with very multiplying eyes, while the "elaborate pageant" had to be considerably diluted to make it extend the advertised mile. But what the proprietors lacked in equine force was compensated for by the talent of the company. A red-faced, raw-boned, audacious troupe it was, with clowns, vaulters, musical jesters, trick-act and bare-back riders, sylphs of the arena, jugglers, contortionists, and athletes; and last, but by no means least, a great attraction known as "Boneless Joey of Japan," the most fiend-like sprite that ever tied himself into a terrible knot; without backbone or any other bone—an india-rubber demon run to seed. He had been wont to admire little 'Walter,' whose fear of him amounted to aversion. Somehow the priceless Joey had straggled from or tumbled off the great triumphal car, and by the laws governing or favouring such evil loves, his were the eyes to light on 'Walter,' as he

hurried along to take his part in the performance already commenced. Spell-bound, the girl felt powerless, then darted a rapid look round to discover some outlet of escape: there was only the length of the street, and some yards ahead the old grey Abbey walls; to be caught in its gloomy cloisters would be worse than to remain and face the danger where men and women passing to and fro held forth some hope of sympathy and help. As the snake fascinates the poor fluttering bird, he never removed his sinister transfixing gaze, stepping gingerly forwards as one may when about to catch some winged beautiful creature that will take to timid flight; she could not remove her eyes, nor flee, but leaning against the door of a baker's shop, experienced the horrible feeling of every limb being lifeless while the heart beats at dangerous speed.

The movement of the creature, sinuous, coiling, soft, thrilled her with horror, she fell back a pace, and the start broke the influence; she hurriedly entered the shop. A woman serving behind the counter looked up, and, surprised by the wan, frightened face, asked if she was not well.

"Will you protect me?" gasped the pretty stranger; "that man is wishing to take me away against my will!" The woman doubtless thought it very strange; she was not unkindly looking and seemed interested by this delicate boy pleading for defence, and when the persecutor entered her shop she went round to the customer's side of the counter, and with arms akimbo, asked him what he wanted, while 'Walter' stole behind her and near the door of her little sitting-room. Then Messrs. Ringdom and Tanner's valuable auxiliary accused the child of being an apprentice of the Circus, and of running away from her masters. It seemed a serious charge, and the woman lowered her arms, turned slowly round, and asked "Is this the truth?" The child's head drooped. Then looking up with touching candour she replied, "Yes! I was ill-used."

"If you belong to them I mustn't interfere!" With a passionate cry 'Walter' caught hold of the woman's arm, but she was obdurate, entertaining strong ideas upon the runaway question, and actually saw the panting fragile child, overwhelmed by this indifference and pallid with terror, taken from the shop and away in the direction of the Circus.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONSTANCE.

The girls of Devon are extremely beautiful. Take a hay-field, and glance at the tanned, rosy-cheeked peasantry; there is more splendour of face and form upon that odorous hedge-girt area than may sometimes be found in an entire county. Or, take a village-school in Devonshire, and look along the forms where girlhood sits at work, and one may see some of the loveliest faces conceivable. Yet again, take a bazaar, flower-show, concert, or one or other of those meets dear to womankind, and what a grouping together of sweet faces will be seen! Constance Evelyn was born in Devonshire and reared in Devonshire, and that air which seems to kindle beauty naturally had nurtured this exquisite girl, and that Devonshire sun which paints the glow of health as nowhere else had tinted the cheeks with a glow that shamed the beauties of Devon itself. And even as impurity floats over some whole counties like a miasma, infecting and polluting the entire surface of the people, so there are counties exempt from the abomination—counties where the meadows should be flecked with lilies from year's end to end, and where a white banner should be at the entrance to the towns, with these words upon its snowy breadth,—"*Here girl or woman may dwell in safety.*" That would be well, for man would then know where to send his wife or daughters. Among such Elysian lands Devonshire ranks with honour. And Constance Evelyn, whose nature, character, and disposition were a happy blending of those fair traits rendering dear to us the names of Elaine and Evangeline, partook in its fairness of this purity of Devon.

She had barely passed the portals of her seventeenth year, and taken upon her the grace of graver girlhood, yet was so quietly gentle and so thoughtful, one might have supposed her of more advanced age.

The Minister had known her from childhood, had marked the beautiful expanding of that purity and thought, and the loveliness, like a dream: could he do otherwise than mark it? Often he had said to Evelyn, "Your daughter will be wondrously beautiful; do, pray, be careful with her!" But this was no more than brother or friend might think of, and say with highest motive. One day Mr. Evelyn had said, "I am thinking of sending Constance to boarding-school; I cannot afford a good governess at home, and the child's education will suffer." This was long ago. His friend answered, "Pray do nothing of the kind! Engage the best governess procurable, and look to me for the payment of her salary." And the curate accepted this munificent offer, and Constance was expensively educated at the cost of their friend. Constance, with her delicately sensitive nature, became uncomfortable under this, upon passing into that thoughtful stage; but she had been so scrupulously reared to look upon this man as the best friend they possessed in all the world, so taught to regard him in the light of a benefactor and a princely genius of all good, that she gave him that touching reverence verging upon adoration which girls bestow upon the hero of their chaste and poetical musing. Not a being—not even one of her sweet girl-companions—knew of the recesses in her heart where she treasured her tenderest idealism; to speak of it seemed sacrilege; even to think of it spoiled the delicate charm with its rapture of secret possession. And ere long this reserving of fine reveries, and still weaving of beautiful dreams, resolved itself into the one form possible; and Love was born. From thence set in a most blissful era, and this experience also was too sacred to be confided to every girl she met; so that what with the reverent adoration, the sensitive gratitude, the tender idealism, the halo of beauty, the shadowing of genius, the fascination, and the silken tyranny of love, this poor little mortal was deeply enamoured long before leaving Torquay.

Before ever that event occurred, or was even broached, Constance knew all about the plight she was in. Nobody told her, because nobody knew of it; she discovered it herself under guidance of those instincts which are the feelers and susceptibilities of the perception; and the girl was troubled. The feeling seemed to her verging upon treachery, and it caused her sorrow. She had, as she thought, one consolation—*he* did not know of it. She felt if he should ever find it out, she must sink into the earth, or hide her shame-dyed face, never to lift it more—a feeling arising partly of her exquisite modesty, partly of imperfect knowledge of him.

For days after their settling in Brighton she avoided with all her strength the chance of a meeting with him, and even sought to persuade her father to permit her to visit some distant relatives; but Mr. Evelyn was inexorable, and expressed his displeasure upon thus being pressed.

It was quite true Constance had often been at the Hall; she had there passed the blissful dream-time of her life. In those days, before ever trouble and sorrow and humiliation had broken him upon the wheel of stern suffering, Lionel Travers was, (with his charm of refined manner, his beauty of person, his grace of intellect and genius, and the tenderness inseparable from the man,) of all with whom she could possibly have been thrown in contact the very being who would impress her by outward influence.

And he, who had always treated her as the petted girl-companion of his wife and playmate of his child, experienced honest pleasure without a thought of harm when she was with them; and as he would have loved a little sister of his wife's, he welcomed her sunny presence gladly as an additional charm to home and the fireside circle, or to the quiet summer evening's roaming for ferns; so he loved the girl well, and later on saw no cause to prevent his proving the friend of her father. And there was a touch of home-sickness about that invitation to the curacy, the yearning to look on the old face of a friend—of one, *the* one, of all that had known him then. There was hunger to hear that gentle girl talk lovingly of his; there was the faintness and weariness so often attendant upon

a great purpose, when one feels it impossible to go on and adhere to the line marked out without something that shall refresh by its olden memory. It is a human need, and often an absolute necessity; and when Robert Evelyn came to Brighton it was a sincere pleasure to the Minister.

When Westley Garland found the girl avoided him he was, at first, much hurt; this also he did not show; then he said to himself, "She is growing older, and this is mere maidenly reserve, the exquisite quality which is so marked in Constance." And he waited; the timidity natural under the circumstances would pass. He knew the touching reverence with which she had looked up to him in the past; in his present position this would be augmented.

As the waves of wheat-ears shake from them the evening sun, stirred by the low winds of hot July days, murmuring along hidden ridges of cool earth: or as broad belts of the sea rear themselves to the flood of light, while swift hot currents circle and eddy about their strong, deep bosoms: so did the pure love of this innocent flower from Arcadia dally with the thought and the musing that was so precious, yet of which she was all afraid. Those shadows, those shadows! Flitting across her picture, not as mere sleepy rests, but shading, casting roseate colour into dense relief: and even the colour on her picture at times taking weird and irregular and inharmonious twisting, with red entering a miniature arena for a joust with black, while the tilting of blue, of green, and of yellow was out of its order completely. The picture became very overcast, what with this and its shading, so that poor little Constance was troubled, vastly troubled. She had not learnt of her sex the art of holding hues or emotions in supreme control; for was she not motherless, sisterless, none of womankind at hand with invaluable teaching, no too-sagacious girl-friend to enlighten? All alone, nursing her fancies like so many hot-house flowers, and half afraid of these, being unversed in botany, and aware by instinct only of pretty things that sting or poison!

Then like stars, or points of hushed intensity, there were the joyous recollections: old memories and recalled times of quiet

delight passed in his society and that of his dear wife. There had been the converse by sweet sound on autumn evenings, when she had played the accompaniment to his richly modulated voicing of old hymns, and when Ella's voice had joined with hers in musical praise. Such seasons were dearer to both husband and wife than those grand visiting evenings, when the *élite* of the neighbourhood assembled in their rooms, and Eagle Hall for the time lost its customary serenity.

Even now Constance had the enjoyment of the Sabbath, and would steal into his church all unobserved, and hang upon his utterance. She would ever remember that first occasion of hearing him in the pulpit. Until then she had never known the man, nor realized his power, but from then he was a being of yet higher and more exalted nature, and her reverence increased, whatever her love might be. She had not been in the least surprised to find that their friend had entered upon a clerical life; it had often been the topic of his expressed wish for the future. But Constance had been marvellously surprised to learn not only that Mrs. Travers was not resident with him under his new name and in his affluence, but that the unfortunate lady and her little girl had altogether disappeared. It was curious, and Miss Evelyn puzzled her pretty head over it while at needlework until the pretty head ached.

The curate and his daughter were as surprised as any one at the suddenness with which all had been brought about, for the goods were removed by strangers without commotion and with great haste. They had visited Mrs. Travers two or three times, but had seen that their friend desired to be alone with her grief, and calling one day, it was to find the place stripped, and their friends gone no one knew whither. It was brought painfully to mind that first Sunday morning upon which Constance heard the Minister preach, when his text, taken from the fourth chapter of Lamentations, was that pathetic refrain, "*They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets.*" The full power of moving the heart, of which he was so consummate a master, was never evidenced with more touching eloquence than in that discourse; and to Constance,

who knew all that his heart was full of, it was doubly so. Yet was its pathos not oppressive, rather yielding a fragrance that rejoices: if one accepted the workmanship for its beauty it was necessary to accept the casket for its essence, neither being worthy without the other. And while walking homeward there came to mind the words of her father's favourite poet:—

> "I went to listen to my teacher friend.
> O Friend above, thanks for the friend below!
> Who having been made wise, deep things to know,
> With brooding spirit over them doth bend,
> Until they waken words, as wings, to send
> Their seeds far forth, seeking a place to grow."

A day or two afterwards, when Mr. Garland met Robert Evelyn, he told him he was in a little difficulty about his house at Hawkingdean—his favourite house, by the way—a species of hermitage to which the overtaxed student retired for his sole seasons of leisure. The housekeeper had been summoned to the sick-bed of her daughter in Wales; might be absent some little time; he esteemed the woman, and wished to keep the situation open for her, but it would be inconvenient; the Minister's poor would suffer; the system of charity he had organized would be thrown out of order.

Then Mr. Evelyn said,—

"If you can put up with her inexperience, Constance shall go; she is a capital little housekeeper, though I say it, and I am sure, if she once gets in the way of it, will supply Mrs. Mellerton's place very well."

"I think this offer most kind," said Mr. Garland. He did, but for the moment thought not of the young lady herself, except as recalling those fern gatherings, and carol singings. Yes, he thought the offer kind, and said so. Equally guileless the curate jogged homeward, and was met on the mat by his carefully-trained daughter, to whom, stooping, he gave a very affectionate kiss, and—"Piece of good luck for you, my dear; extraordinary chance of distinguishing yourself; first step in life! Always remember your poor father's precepts, and keep

your dear mother's ensample before you; lock the tea-caddy after going to it; clean paper the bottoms of your cupboards; be sure and have all the corners of the rooms well swept out; see that the servants wipe their shoes; look all round the last thing at night; and, above all, keep the place very quiet. I'm exceedingly delighted; opportunity of proving the Evelyns are not ungrateful; happy coincidence, that daughter in Wales; ought not to say so either, but it's most extraordinary, that it is!"

The well-meaning curate paused; and interested, surprised, and fluttering, his daughter inquired of him the meaning of the odd address; she hoped it held out a promise of her being enabled to quit Brighton, so she awaited his explanation with eagerness.

"Briefly, my dear, I've a comfortable, responsible, lady-like situation in view for you, upon which you will be required to enter to-morrow, and in which I hope you will prove yourself worthy of your father's precepts and your mother's ensample."

"I will try to do so, Papa dear!" winding her arms about him very lovingly. "I have always been your own good, obedient, dutiful little girl, have I not?"

"You have, my child, thanks to careful bringing up, and I hope will always continue to prove so!"

"Well, Papa, what is it, and where? Not in Brighton, I hope?"

"Not in Brighton!"

"Then I am willing to take it, wherever it is, whatever it may be!" and in the intensity of her relief she literally hugged her far-seeing parent.

"You promise me this very faithfully, Constance?"

"Most faithfully, Papa!" cried his daughter eagerly.

"Caught!" said Robert Evelyn to himself, highly rejoiced; and aloud, "It is to keep our friend Mr. Garland's country-house at Hawkingdean, during the temporary absence of his housekeeper; perhaps, if you are scrupulously careful, *altogether*."

Gradually the arms released their hold, but she still leaned upon him, and her beautiful head fell heavily to his shoulder.

There was no other movement, and, looking on the slant, he could see that her face was very white. Then he turned, encircling her, and supported the frail burden, inanimate and powerless;—she had fainted.

"Bless my soul!" cried Robert Evelyn, "this is most extraordinary!" He had not heard the door softly opened; the intruder stepped forward at a stride, deeply solicitous.

"Don't be alarmed—understand these faintings—retired medical man—tremendous practice. Shut the door, please—pass me a footstool; now, something cold, letter-weight over there do very well—bring her to in a jiffy—painful spectacle—father's heart—look another way, please: so, so, coming round—presence of mind everything. Turn the cat out, shut her in the yard—can't have squalling in the passage! Glad I called—just in time—shut the door again as you go out."

The singular visitor, whom Mr. Evelyn remembered to have called once before, had a knee on the footstool, a foot on the floor, and, supporting the slight form with true professional regard, had, as he said, brought her round. So much recovered was his patient that, as the door closed upon Mr. Evelyn, (covering the cat's head with his coat-tail to prevent its remonstrance during transit,) she was entirely conscious, and released herself, very much embarrassed.

"Don't be put out, my dear, I am your friend, and old enough to be your father. Know your secret—don't be ashamed of it—have a little chat first opportunity: accept this offer; why not? Best friend of his poor wife's; left the country—mistaken, I think; but, however—queer sex—by all means keep his house, look after him—it's your duty—no wrong attached; always stick to your instincts—they point to Hawkingdean: the poor man wants somebody faithful and attentive: hard world this for the widower—widower myself, very much so—hired people selfish, negligent—don't look after one's comfort, everything to a literary man! Take my advice—study his comfort—he deserves it; noble man—wonderful: obey your father—wishes are law—good father, I'm sure!"

The retired medical man had heard the good father enter,

and *he* heard the liberal commendation of himself. He advanced to thank the opportune visitor, who, like Asmodeus, always seemed turning up in the nick of time; while Constance, startled, half frightened, and certainly bewildered, rising and staggering a little, asked permission to withdraw. The ex-disciple of Æsculapius himself opened the door for the fair child, and contrived to intercept her downcast glance, conveying a swift look full of meaning as a cunningly-worded telegram. Then he returned and took the seat Mr. Evelyn had placed for him by the fire.

"Charming daughter, yours—I have a charming daughter, —let us shake hands, we have not yet done so!"

They did so, Mr. Evelyn thinking the gentleman the most singular person he had ever encountered; but then he knew Brighton was not like Torquay, that the inhabitants are cosmopolitan, and, probably, the callers upon the clergy as diversified as in any sphere of ministerial labour upon which a man could enter. When the stranger called upon Mr. Evelyn in the first instance it was to congratulate him upon coming to Brighton, to make his acquaintance, to wish him long and continued success in his new field of labour, to offer his friendly services, to invite him to call now and then with Miss Evelyn at Regina Cottage, and to hint that a pretty good donation to local charities would create a very favourable impression upon the minds of the public. Of this Mr. Barnard undertook the disbursement, to save, as he said, Mr. Evelyn's losing invaluable time peddling about ascertaining the most worthy, and the new curate was there and then mulct in two 5*l.* notes; for which he was a very great fool doubtless, but let any one try first the sensation of entering the most popular church in Brighton as a co-helper in the work of the ministry, and next the peculiar experience of being called upon by Mr. Noel Barnard, who was no ordinary ambassador, and all wonder will cease.

"Thought I'd just look in to see how you were getting on; think it the duty of the parishioners; great fault of the present day stand-offishness, pastorate aloof from the people, people aloof from the pastorate; glad to know you, pleased to see you looking so well, very!"

And the visitor nodded good-humouredly, although a degree patronizingly to the new curate. Somehow, somewhere, from somebody, the Rev. Robert Evelyn had heard that Brighton was chiefly peopled with doctors who were practising and doctors who had done practising; this was evidently one of the latter, in all probability a man of weight and substance. A little old certainly, but then so much the more safe; dear Constance was growing up; if anything happened to himself, the world was a cold place, one could not make a friend too many in the interests of the young and those depending upon one. Mr. Evelyn received the visitor's friendly advances and gracious sociableness with the good manners he considered becoming in a curate who had not saved, not inherited, and was not expecting that which is called by people of the free seats, "the needful."

"I agree with you, Mr. Barnard, that a more fraternal spirit might exist. It is our duty to smooth each other's paths and lighten each other's burdens."

"Well, I've tried to live up to that myself, but it's such a precious ungrateful world! Did it ever strike you so? And I've found so many people about 'who are not what they seem,' as the poet says; can't make it out. Who are you and who am I, and who's the other fellow? It's like being in a ship's hold full of Dutch cheeses in a storm. Takes me all my time to make people out."

Mr. Evelyn began to feel slightly uncomfortable; there was a something about this person, with all his free and agreeable manner, which the plain-going clergyman did not half like.

"It is quite certain, sir, the world is over-full of deceptive persons. I mean those it is difficult for an honest man to fathom."

With great solemnity the visitor laid a hand upon the other's arm, and said gravely, "It's positively awful! One of these days there'll be an explosion, I know, to make more room for the honest ones."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LADY LINDON'S FAREWELL RECEPTION.

THE season had drawn to its close. It wanted sixteen days to Christmas. Those of London and the counties were departing, and ere long there would be a great blank in Brighton Society.

There was some excitement astir: Lady Lindon would hold her last reception of the season, and it was rumoured the lion would be there. If so, it would be no slight honour, for Westley Garland had been invited everywhere, and had been nowhere; he did not go into Society, although so essentially fitted for it. But it somehow became talked of in select circles that he would be at this reception, and it was looked upon as an event, although people were not so very much surprised that he should go to Lady Lindon's, for somehow there had been a little mixing up of their names. Nobody quite knew how it had come about, but their names had been generally coupled when one or other was under discussion.

Lady Lindon troubled herself as little as possible previous to receiving her guests: a reception was as cool a piece of custom as resuming the family name after a catastrophe. People were exceedingly glad to have the opportunity once more of curiously noting her ladyship's residence, which they strolled over with the delighted expectancy one might suppose they would display in prying into the mysterious chambers of some barbaric chieftain. They knew so many ordinary people, all possessed of the approved elegant drawing and reception rooms — not a pin to choose between them, as though the furnishing of interiors was stereotyped. A visit to Lady Lindon was a new sensation, it revived after the sickening uneventful insipidity of customary polite attention. And it was as Lady Comdarlington

said,—"One met so many nice people there, whom one never seemed to meet anywhere else; such talented souls, the class that do not care for visiting, and are very difficult to draw out of their shells; the thoughtful men and women whom somehow we miss altogether; a little peculiar I grant you, but eminently interesting."

The prestige of Lady Lindon's *réunions* certainly culminated upon the report circulating that the Minister would be present. "By which is meant, I suppose," ventured the Honourable Mrs. Glover, "if he can quit the sick bed of one of the lower orders! I do think, dear, there should be some law to control valuable people like Westley Garland, who are certainly raised up for the special behoof of people in Society, not to waste valuable time fiddle-faddling about amongst the lower vulgar!"

"He is such a darling!" murmured the Countess lusciously, as though he were a pomegranate and exquisite to the taste.

"I never knew an instance," said Miss Glover, "of one petted by the *élite* as he is, having so ordinary and gross a taste.

"I won't have you say a word against my hero, a duck of a man. Ah! if you but knew his value, could realize the bliss of his being unmarried, and—you know what I mean!"

The Countess languidly fanned herself. Her charming friend coldly replied, "Pray don't talk nonsense, dear! This person is all very well, and undoubtedly clever; but plain *Mrs.* would never please Mamma, you know, so what is the use of talking of it? Granted the wife of a man as talented, what position does that confer in Society? And you know Mamma thinks so much of that. The glory and lustre are all enshrined about the male creature, and as a rule I think the wives of these glorious and lustrous male creatures have an uncommonly hard time of it, a reflected light being at best but a chilly sort of radiance."

"Well, I declare you are growing quite cynical; your Mamma must spare you to come and stay awhile with us. I will try if I cannot persuade you into seeing that there is many a gem of a man who does not sport his panelled quartering. But now tell me what you are going to wear at Lady Lindon's?" When converse wandered into this channel, there was harmony.

The people who have a penchant for the unique were espe-

cially glad to have again the opportunity of viewing the interior of her ladyship's unconventional abode. And it was considered a shame that the splendid flowers of her conservatory should bloom and drop their gorgeous blossom broadcast and unseen except by the haughty mistress, who, for all they knew, might be scampering the Pyrenees with an alpenstock when next the Brighton season came round.

How the Minister came to give consent was in this wise. Compliant with his wish, her ladyship had called upon Lady Ellerby; it was a mission peculiarly objectionable to the first-named lady, but she performed her part with a grace and tact a less sensitive, less pain-disciplined one would have failed in altogether. And Lady Ellerby was susceptible to this; at once recognized it to be no inquisitive, hollow, mock sentimental visit, but one of deep import, dictated by a very high purpose, and Lady Ellerby experienced the gratitude none of womankind more genuinely feel than the young wife who fears herself to be neglected by her husband, and is visited by a friend of her own sex for the express purpose of dealing in a straightforward manner with the difficulty, and of smoothing the little ruggednesses which are such stumbling-blocks upon the path. Simultaneously, Westley Garland proceeded to town, and found out the artistic retreat of the lordly painter. His acquaintance with that individual was of the brief kind; but, as we know, he thought favourably of the truant. Lord Ellerby received the Minister with unfeigned pleasure, and when he opened his business with his own natural delicacy, Lord Ellerby laughed with frank delight. That people should have been busy with his name, *his*, the most erratic wanderer and roving Bohemian that ever pencilled the water-torrents of Norway or pine-clothed crags of the Tyrol, so upset his equilibrium he enjoyed the idea as he only could enjoy such a situation. "I should very much like to assist these people's kind inquiry, but unfortunately the lovely objects of my protection have vanished, as such always do, and left not a kiss behind! So there isn't great cause for apprehension, Mr. Garland. I am a student and disciple of nature, you must know, and care not much the form it take, so the form be beautiful. All the same, I am aware of

a cultured class who, while admiring the sculpturesque in art and poetry, will not tolerate the artistic and poetic in sculpture. Such would denounce my idealism of the beautiful while extolling the result of that idealism; and I have no patience to argue the question with this elegant division of critics. But now come and see for yourself, and tell me, could *you* have permitted such lovely children to have passed from you unlimned? They will be an ever-present pleasure to me!" Saying this, he revealed the studies where alone, and in company, the children of Lady Lindon figured with telling effect; it was the Minister's first introduction to the pair whose story was so romantic and unfortunate. Their story, as told by his lordship, aroused the interest of this investigator of human sorrow and misfortune, and he said, "The whole affair is so exceptional and worthy of further inquiry, the suddenness of their departure ought not, I think, to be laid aside so dispassionately!" "Well, there is not much difficulty," answered his lordship, "in discovering what has become of them—one has gone into Yorkshire, the other we should find, doubtless, at the farmer's." When Mr. Garland returned to Brighton it was not to forget either face, thanks to the skill of the artist. And Lord Ellerby bore with him a day or two later, miniatures of the engaging pair as a gift for Flora. Detailing the result of his quest to Lady Lindon, Mr. Garland said, "As you wished, I have delivered an invitation to your reception on the 16th; his lordship returns to-morrow, and will come to present his duty to your ladyship." She smiled. "I want one other guest to crown my pleasure—my ambassador: you will come?" giving him her hand graciously. "I will try, but you know I am an uncertain being."

It soon became known that Lord Ellerby would be there and it was a source of gratification—that young noble being a general favourite, and having been so long abroad. He went to and fro, from his place in Paris to Florence, where he had a delicate arbour-like cottage, blown or trailed together from a dream of his, and where he painted fantastic studies for the churches without reward, save the inward pleasure derived from the giving; and the pleased Florentines, without

clashing the English milord with their old Angelicos and Botticellis, would hang his saintly heads in dim lady chapels, where devout peasants, themselves more fair, would kneel much moved by the haunting eyes whereto they prayed.

Upon the evening of the reception the mansion was a-gleam with lights and the glittering adjuncts of a splendid entertainment. Away in a back room, sitting at a little table of brown wood, upon which he leaned an elbow, was Lord Darrell, disturbed by the commotion; it was one of the nights he dreaded, one of the public nights; he avoided them, crept right away out of the domain of racket and noise. House-cleaning sends some sensitive folk nearly out of their mind; in this instance it was the reception of company; his lordship hated it. He was left to himself; not a soul went near unless he rang for them, and he would sit with his elbow on the table, looking musingly into the fire, immovable for long periods, "slowly forming" upon the geologic principle. But upon this particular night Lord Darrell somehow became restless and irascible. He heard carriage after carriage dash up, name after name announced; heard indication of the large assembly moving in the state rooms, and later on heard music. It set him quivering, affected his nerves; he seemed to wish to join the throng, and literally saw no reason why he should not; experienced the desire to interchange a word or two with old cronies who possibly might be present, and with whom he used to be akin in politics. He would go down. He did go down, scratching furtively at the fringe of tawny whisker, and looking timorously from the corners of his eyes. It was a scene of great magnificence which met his bewildered gaze; his queenly daughter, more magnificent than all, was seated upon a species of daïs at the far end. So many brilliant beings intervened, his lordship could not summon resolution to penetrate so far; and after unavailing attempts to discover some eye that would meet his own with kindness in it, or a face that would turn to him with friendliness, he gave it up, glided over to the wall and the shelter of an alcove, where, upon a settee, he devoted himself to nursing one of his legs on the other, interlacing his hands over his knee, and watching the

pageant from beneath his pent brows. He was the subject of ridicule and satirical comment, he knew. That insulting patrician vulgarism, the eye-glass, was lifted to inspect the strange being while passing, and he felt it, but he did not stir, foolishly perhaps thinking he had as good a right there as most other people. It was considered, or tacitly admitted, to be not quite the thing to recognize his lordship, and no one did so. Society assembled to recognize a lion, and to notice this decidedly foxy-looking individual would have been very bad form. Society has not agreed to be saddled with the fathers and other intrusive relatives and followers of those it encrowns and enthrones.

Until the lion of the evening arrived, the correct thing seemed to be, pressing forward for a word with Lady Lindon. Consummate elegance, cold and sad grace, marked her ladyship's reception of her guests. They had not noticed it before, but it was now remarked that her ladyship wore dress mourning; it was pronounced highly becoming, but for whom had the freak taken her to mourn? The majority of people settled it to their satisfaction by supposing that, having exhausted every colour upon earth, her ladyship had now fallen back upon this sombre splendour, and had accomplished a distinct success. It was merely a court robe of French grey satin, over which were aerial clouds of black silk gauze confined by a delicate tracery of jet; a fall of lace and jet over the bare shoulders, a large cross of jet upon the bosom, where a chaste spray of white flowers was secured by a diamond brooch; a tiara of great magnificence, one of her Indian toys, consisting of regal diamonds, surrounded the haughtily-borne head: from this a long and graceful fall of corresponding tulle or gauze; upon the right arm a highly-chased bracelet of jet, entwining a circle of diamonds; a rich, yet unassuming costume, and, for Lady Lindon, very much within bounds.

But the lion was late. Society hoped it was not to be disappointed; meantime contented itself with lionizing Lord Ellerby who was everywhere, all over the place. He enjoyed a word here and a word there before people had time to tire him, and he kept up a running play of amusing remark which made his breaking in upon the several dull groups a mutual pleasure.

"Some choice stories afloat about you, Ellerby! What have you been up to? Assure you, if you don't mend, you'll get black-balled!"

It was the Earl of Comdarlington, a great dandy; having a piquant piece of scarlet bloom in his coat, and an infinite drawl that was mildly irritating.

"Would your lordship really like to know?"

"I should, 'pon honour! Devil of a nuisance to lose a fellow like yourself for so long a time!"

"I thought so; that is why I came back. Well, I've been decorating my summer-house!"

And the handsome artist-lord was off before the exquisite had time to reply. Gay, chatty, full of anecdote, with bits of cynical merriment, sharp, harmless, glittering as the corners of crystals; primed with the latest art news from every capital in Europe, distributing delicious sprigs of gossip until every group had a little posy of their own, well informed on all forthcoming dramatic, operatic, and literary events also, Lord Ellerby was everywhere the life and soul of the party. But with all this he was the last to satisfy scandal or feed personal gossip—and especially relative to himself; he would as soon have thought of troubadouring the sunny lays of Baudelaire, De Musset, Gautier, or Beranger, as to enter into conversation upon matters of delicacy with the exquisitely perfumed Earl. "Genius," says Carlyle, "has privileges of its own; it selects an orbit for itself; and, be this never so eccentric, if it is indeed a celestial orbit, we mere star-gazers must at last compose ourselves; must cease to cavil at it."

Lord Ellerby preferred, with a haughty, yet affable ease, to rely upon his privileges, and any cavillers were regarded with a nonchalance that was eminently provoking, yet eminently curative. This courtly painter, follower of no modern school, not from contemptuous indifference, but that his erratic fancy luxuriated where it would, spelt but one language upon the canvas—the idealism of the Beautiful. He painted not for gold, fame, honour, and applause, but for the supreme pleasure it afforded himself; thus, when his peers stepped forward with

their criticism, it was one of those impertinences prudently brushed aside with a flutter of his handkerchief, and forgotten instantly. A message quivered upon his canvas, the message which rendered the gorgeous Florentines and Lombardians magnificent; Colour as an expression, Loveliness as an idealism. It cannot be said that he followed in the steps of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, or Guido, because he followed in no steps; but the licence of these masters in regard to colour and form were his especial features. One day Lady Lindon said to him, "What curious studies you paint, neither classical nor modern, an odd commingling of both!"

"Ay, I like these conceits, they are antidote to the prosaic. I never could darken my stage with faces like flashes of light broken upon dull bronze, a dense purple air that seems heavy with sad and weary hearts, when one can well-nigh hear the fall of a rain of tears, while around lie the burnt-out ashes of pleasure; I don't care for it! Cupids and Sylphs gathering daffodils, near Hampstead Heath if you like, only by all means let us have the Cupids and Sylphs, and I think it's a shame only setting them down as the painters do in Thessalian groves, Elysian meadows, Hesperian gardens, or on Olympian heights. But you shall see my latest piece of extravagance!"

"I shall be very pleased."

"Thought in my pictures is not a cold spirit that stands still, and requires grasping by other spirit-thought, without which it is lifeless and loveless; a frozen mysticism, fantastic, dim, and dreamy; a warmth-yielding essence may-be, but needing the wooing of an outer warmth to give back glow for glow; my fancies rather spring upon one, at least they do upon me, quit their dead thraldom to live in our company, and, like cherished memories of the long ago, live with us hauntingly."

Yes; she acknowledged the truth of it when the picture was unveiled before her, and the pretty pair seemed to start to life and spring upon her, as might eager children yearning to be taken to a mother's heart. Truly had he said the memories live with us hauntingly; and these, with their exquisite reality and passionate reminder, dwelt in her very heart. It was with deep interest that she heard his story of the coming and

the going, the flitting through the woods of doves, the idyllic romance fallen like an autumn poem, and how the bower of pine wood had now lost the power to charm. It was with new and singular emotion that her ladyship gazed upon the picture, forgetting all else in that spell of rekindled maternal love. A flood of ruddy golden light; a luscious fruit-heavy languor of autumn days; the flutter of birds, the flash of butterflies, with wings like the fall of bejewelled leaves; mossed trunks of rare old apple-trees; the sun setting through the boughs like a flush of gems behind Italian vineyards; and a trellis of lovely flowers, which the artist never hesitated to throw in everywhere, altogether regardless of the unities; this was the picture, and there, reclining, were the children, not garbed after the precedent of to-day, but with as unwonted freedom as though come down from Zeuxis or Apelles.

In her ladyship's sleeping apartment, upon a small table near to the silk and lace curtains of her couch, were two articles dear beyond all price to their owner: a slender vase, white, beautiful, wherein some dead lilies, there since a tiny hand gathered them and set them therein beside her bed, to woo by this infantine delicacy a caress from the mother, insensible as marble then, but the shedder of passionate floods of tears before the emblem since. Somehow a fillet of autumn leaves seemed to encircle the vase while she looked upon it through her tears after that episode of the picture; and she opened a little book beside it, a mere child's picture-book, but God only knew how dear; between the leaves of which were pressed pale primroses, and one little flower once blue as those pretty eyes that sought it, when one day it had been brought to her and laid lovingly upon her knee.

And the painting haunted her, she could not tell why, but those lovely faces lingered as none had ever done before; and, for the first time in her life, she asked a favour,—

"Give me your painting!"

He had no copy of it, it was dear to him; he loved those pretty ones it idealized; it was a struggle, parting with the valued piece of work, yet it was like him to say smilingly,—

"With much pleasure."

Fair was the scene presented that night of the reception, and Society was represented as it alone is upon these exceptional occasions, when English girls and matrons bouquet themselves into glowing groups of colour, with laughter just one note above a ripple, and conversation in that rich repose, the especial trait of the well-bred: or stroll the rooms with a grace that seems regulated by the music. Some of the old people make up a kind of rubber in odd corners, remote from the music, where they talk scandal between the passing of the notables. One or two of the dowagers gather their lace close and go quietly off to sleep, from which they awaken cold and cross, to complain that the harps seem sadly out of tune. The old lords sit stock still, looking hard at one another, and discussing politics as though each were the presiding governor of an universe. The people who have been about are in full force, and tell graphically how their carriage broke down on one of the Apennine roads, of being overtaken by a great storm while driving from Geneva, or of the upset upon Lucerne; how they had to shelter the last new travelling extravagance from Wörth in a Bernese herdsman's hut; and how the Bass was utterly undrinkable at a picnic outside Carlsruhe. A largeness of luxury and comfortable ease characterized these travelled records, the prevalent opinion being, as the cynical Comdarlington preferred to put it, "What on earth is the use of entering upon the fatigue of existence, if things are not to be made comfortable for one?" Testy old gentlemen are there, who love the coaches and hate the railways. They are great cronies, and to this day treasure in old drawers high stocks, brass buttons, knee breeches, and gaiters, believing the good old times will return, and that they will die in them. They invite to their rook-haunted manorial acres with the large-hearted hospitality of fine old English gentlemen. They look out of place at this gay gathering, and when one of the new school scrutinizes them through an eye-glass, much as Belzoni examined the venerable Egyptian beetles, they close up and proudly talk of the past. There is the inevitable coterie whose ideas are bounded by the course, and they are very conversational upon the race; they have Goodwood fresh in recollection;

they know a great deal of Goodwood, from its erection as a hunting-seat by the son of Charles the Second. They are loud in praise of the Course, which they vote the finest in the kingdom, and the Park, with its stately cedars of Lebanon, to say nothing of the ornamental woods upon the forty acres of grounds around the house. Their lady friends join with enthusiasm in the praise, the recognized walk of our day possessing unrivalled fascination. There is an old Duke who carelessly joins the Goodwood coterie; a prince upon turf, the father of his club, a spirit of old chivalrous days which lent to beauty its hand through cloud and sunshine, took its snuff from delicately porcelained trifles, and bowed to a woman but fought a man to the death for a slur on the honour of a friend. He will gracefully vie with a Lennox or a Berkeley in the point of anecdote, and will tell you the history of county sport from its founder downwards; he is intimate with the origin of the great meetings, possesses records of 1710, when Parkhurst established Epsom, and of 1727, when Ascot was popular with the Duke of Cumberland, and of 1776, when Colonel St. Leger started the Doncaster. Farther back than these he has the story of venerable Newmarket, which Charles the Second, a liberal patron of the turf, supported in 1667. The Duke of Mainwaring, of the "Four-in-hand Club," is a recognized authority, and they listen to his pleasant chatter with polite attention. The Duchess is there, and, next to Lady Linden, is the most elegant woman in the rooms; her ladyship is of advanced years, but possessed of infinite majesty; her silver hair imparts dignified beauty to a head that, in its day, was very haughtily borne, but now is surpassingly graceful without haughtiness.

Naturally talk ran upon the coming lion. An aged lord, himself an author of past fame, bestowed a word of praise upon this favourite of a later day. "That last book of his will live! Admirable! Your servant, my lady!" with the old Court bow while the Duchess extended her hand, then shaking hands with the Duke, tapping a massive snuff-box, a souvenir of some monarch: and while the two interchanged the old-school courtesy the Duchess turned to a friend, and the ladies were soon discussing the possible and hoped-for

coming of the popular preacher. An old lady near, with a Holbein-like complexion, and a fabric of lace, snowdrops, and diamonds hiding the scalp from the criticism of the irreverent, who had been calmly sleeping, hearing something about a minister, awoke in a tremor, murmuring one of the responses in the Litany, evidently under the apprehension that she had fallen asleep in church.

The ideas concerning the institution known as Mr. Garland's Church were curious; a prevailing conviction seemed to be that it was a beautiful sanctuary where little indiscretions were extracted from the *élite*, made into patchwork, and given to the poor; where perfumed gloves dallied with ivory-bound church services, or fans fluttered a sort of patronizing approval of the rhythmical measure in David's Psalms; where delicate little bon-bons might be taken from exquisite satin bags and sucked in concert with the music, while more energetic people stood up to sing; and where they could at leisure enjoy that rare and perfect gift of eloquence so distinctively their Minister's. Every one quite expected a word and smile when he appeared upon this scene, and flowers nestling amongst lace upon quick-beating bosoms were sadly fluttered with expectancy. It was getting late; the queenly hostess cast anxious glances towards those doors whereby he would enter; Lady Comdarlington whispered to the Hon. Mrs. Glover, "If he doesn't come, he shall be my 'duck of a man' no longer!" A terrible contingency that would, probably, have brought the Minister from the remotest ends of the earth. The Hon. Mrs. Glover was equally attached, but in a different way; as the champion of woman's rights she appreciated the man who was known to be so tender and so true a friend to her sex. A sort of panic spread as time went on; he would not surely enter thus late. The enterprising Lord Leech told Lady Jane, his sister and coadjutor, that his opinion was the man was doing it to cause a sensation. "He is very vain, as you know, and most peculiar; I met an old lady once who positively assured me she'd seen him drinking hot elder wine with an Italian peasant in the crater of Vesuvius. For my part, I don't believe in the fellow; antecedents too doubtful!" "Excuse me," said a

voice near, with politeness, "Her ladyship does not generally open her doors to those whose antecedents are not known and approved!" And as though having said no more than a passing compliment, Lord Ellerby glided on, threading his way towards the entrance, where, unannounced and unassumingly, the lion had made his way through the crowd, and with a kind inclination of the head to people known to him, proceeded at once to pay his respects to her ladyship, with a cordial grasp of the hand for Lord Ellerby as he passed. And hostess Empress Helen descended from her daïs to him; met him half-way with graceful condescension. "How good of you!" she murmured. "I should have been here before," he explained apologetically, "but one of my poor people is terribly prostrate, it is doubtful if a messenger would have quite filled the province I have been happily engaged in." "And that?—" "Keeping the children quiet while the poor woman slept; there is so much in sleep." "Ever charitable, how good you are! But I must not monopolize you, or my guests will be envious." He bowed, she returned to her seat; there was a flutter of expectation; where would he make for, which group favour with his notice? Straight across to that alcove in the wall, where sheltering curtains almost obscured the old Lord Darrell. Not so obscured but that his tender eye detected him, understood it; and before the courtly crowd he crossed over, warmly took the thin hand no one had taken, seated himself beside the nobleman Society had ignored, and with soft pleasantness of manner sought to woo his interest by conversation. Society shrugged its shoulders, sincerely pitying his taste. Lady Lindon turned a degree paler; the action to her afforded a severe reproach. Wits and beauties alike were much put out; old Dowagers were of opinion it indicated plebeian origin, and the extreme superficiality of his gifts. The Earl of Comdarlington looked with astonishment at the pair through his glass, and muttering, "Good gracious! 'Pon honour now!" finically pursued his fragrant way. Lord Darrell's appreciation of the Minister's notice was excessive. The latter remained a very short time, but devoted the best part of it to the slighted nobleman.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT HAWKINGDEAN—LIFE IN A DOWNLAND VILLAGE.

Within a hollow of the South Downs nestles a quaint little village of perfect Arcadian type. An old-world, dream-life sort of place, with red-brick cottages showing well the roofs Mr. Ruskin deems so essential to a picture, and having much drapery of ivy and other creepers lustrous according to the season; with great clustering of foliage, shrubs and evergreens, and all down the village street a line of wide-spreading trees, between which peep the small shops with breaks of a farm or two, and at the end a church; and with the beautiful amphitheatre of downland, ridges of chalk, the close clean turf, flocks, and their shepherds dozing the idle hours away. Near by the church stands a large rambling old place that seems to have weathered many a generation of pastors and people. It is the parsonage, just the resting-place a peace-loving humble-minded servant of the Cross might rejoice in, all the air about it breathing of devotion and brotherly love. Within were large and lofty chambers, but some of these, as the long years rolled by, became so crowded with literary treasures—volumed minds of long ago—that their space was largely taken up, and filled and stocked with comfortable-looking lines of books wooing one confidently to many an hour's quiet study. The owner of this fair domain is an old man of stately mien, white-haired, benign, gentle of manner, considerate of all. A generation has he laboured in this still sphere, his youth and ardour cooling with the years, until now the life is a calm, the service a repose. He is much revered and loved in the village; he had known these big and brawny Southerners as babies, had seen those tall

women when pretty-toed paddlers on yonder beach, but he had seen little change in the ancient downs, and none in stick or stone of the quiet village.

Roaming for violets one comes upon it unawares; sheltered in the cleft of the weald, it seems to have retreated hither from the vain world, and to be as innocent of the proximity of that gay town and courtly vanity-fair, the metropolis of the hills, as though still with the Druids who once held their mystic rites above here.

How the important marts of change and commerce get along it is impossible to tell: when, decrease will set in amidst the piles of apples and bottles of bull's-eyes it would be rash to predict; the ploughshare young of the district certainly make a flutter occasionally, and Hob-nails and Clumps from the wide tracts of pasture here lay in store for their lonely watching. But these are not all. Round a pond, under the willows, at a sharp angle, as if protecting the retreat from invasion, is stationed the smithy, the awe-inspiring delight of the urchins, who, (coming from school over the neighbouring hill,) congregate at the porch, and gaze timorously in at the Titan. The clink from the anvil is the only sound awakening echo in the village, save when some waggon goes lumbering onward to one of the adjoining homesteads. Fallen amongst nettles, symbolic of progress in the village, are several old wheels, and the connective trade of a wheelwright is illustrated. The grocery and drapery depôt is quaint and original: it would be easy, although it would not be kind, to poke fun at the window and doorway where Hoyle's prints, and dips, struggle for vantage; the little store is accommodating to the cottagers; and as for the gentry —well, the gentry did not deal there in olden times, and now the ledger under the greasy counter has no open account with families of distinction.

These consist of the farmers aforesaid, and the dwellers in three or four villa-cottages, a stuccoed, five-window residence that seems to have strayed from Croydon and got lost, a manor-house of Tudor build, and the old mansion known as the Moated Grange. The manor-house lies ahead of the village, screened by the downs, and looking right away to sea from

lofty upper windows; it is circled by a belt of trees once rook-haunted. A strange man lives here, a scholar, a student of stars, a lover of nature, a disciple of books; one who walks long reaches of the downland looking upon these olden sweeps of hillock with great love, by starlight and by sunlight a lonely, enwrapt wanderer; sometimes, however, accompanied by his little daughter, a pretty child in the dawntime of her teens. The silent man and this fair young creature were in high repute with the peasantry, whose wants it was their pleasure to supply. The dark old house secluded in its trees was looked upon with that touching love, seldom found in England, but frequently in France, where some shadowy old château patron-saints the village. The rural poor of the Down-land resemble their kind across the Channel in a blind sort of reverence for the priest and the scholar. A volume is a sealed mystery held in due awe, while a student with his book is the incarnation of the Dweller upon the Threshold. In the village we tell of, the man with the book was paramount. The very swaying of the trees about his shadowy castle had an occult thoughtfulness. Owls had supplanted the more romantic rooks. At night, when all else was dark from end to end of the valley, timid little ones peeping from their cots saw a light at the big house where a lonely man sat writing, and they loved it, grew to look for it, and because it was ever there it became, despite the denser shadow of the trees, their faith, their polar star. The man had lived long in this village before the prattler came to spell a new and softer science, and now the girl had grown to splendid health by nurture of the Downs, life of these hills drawn in from the first toddling of her tiny feet. Sometimes the student, walking down the slope, would meet the pastor toiling slowly up, his white curls blowing hither and thither, and the good shepherd would pat the little golden fleece and call her the lamb of all his flock, whereat the father would glance half-fondly from his book, and with his usual abstraction murmur,—

"Nay, friend, *mine*, thank God, and the air on these good hills."

And then he would turn to the book again, while the child,

who must love something other than iron erudition, clung to the pillar of the church, which much pleased the patriarch, who would stoop with wondrous tenderness, glancing half-enviously at the man with knit brows, who caught his meaning as those in dreams catch strange fancies.

"You love children?—ah!—Our Saviour commanded—about 160, Hipparchus it was, precession of equinoxes—so, lost myself. Fine child, sir, *and mine*, my very own! Ptolemy determined distances, don't you think so? Not a question but was known to the Arabs;—so—taking your constitutional? Good, but no book—you are welcome to this, old friend, there is much marrow in it. Nay, I shall not need it, I am bound for home."

Another time when they crossed paths the old man commented on her tenuity, and the father, looking from out the past, said thoughtfully, while trifling with the scattered tresses,—

"Ah! her mother was delicate, very; I never saw much of her, but it struck me she was delicate; she went off rather suddenly; if memory serves me, I was deeply engaged at the time, on aberration of light of fixed stars; gave me a deal of thought, up there a long time, saw something, imagine she passed me. Beg pardon, take little one home? Thanks, no; she never leaves me, I hope never will."

The pastor always walked on after these encounters with a placid gentleness that well became the venerable man, but beneath which the close observer might have detected a certain grave solicitude which would have aroused speculation.

The silent, secluded scholar had found it well to have his little one always with him, had come down from his stars, and up from his old dead writers, and off from his vast solitude of downland, to the fresh beauty of the fairy prattler, and it was well: that small thing kept human the heart so cobwebbed by learning. She grew up to be the light of the great grim house and garden. In the village the humble folks looked for her coming as for the good genius of their lot, and many a sly admiring glance was watching the pretty form on the hill during those quiet walks.

Although secluded and removed by position and station, the lonely master of the Bishop's House (it was called the Bishop's House, owing to the amiable Edmund Bonner having here resided) was in no degree of proud or forbidding nature; his courtesy was kingly, extended alike to the monied parvenu located there for the air, and to the labourer on the land, for whom there was ever a word of dreamy kindness. Perhaps no one realized the advantage of so worthy a neighbour more than the pastor, who enjoyed the privilege of entering the large library at will and of adding to his goodly store of tomes by occasional loans of exceptional volumes. He would drop in about every other morning (no one else ever visited the recluse) without ceremony, as desired by the master, content to find the little daughter playing in the garden, or sitting by the fire. At such times something like this would happen.

"Well, lady-bird, waiting for another game at ball? Here goes, then. Ah! you now throw too high for me, let's run and see who catches it."

A race; little one always victor, and such glee. A lozenged lattice, ever so high, would open, and pale Papa looking out to chide, but seeing the pastor, would just call down,

"Morning! Very busy; you'll excuse my coming down? Book or two on the study table you'll like."

And the window would be shut severely, like a clattering protest of the glass against levity, after which they were quieter, went off to the arbour or elsewhere, and made crowns with laurel-leaves and other dainty work, while the old man wove the spell of fairy lore. But that face would come to the high window again and again restlessly, as unable to summon resolution to descend and play with the child, yet jealous of another doing so; wondering what had become of them, looking longingly down on the garden, yet shuddering at thought of the noise they made. Then the student would descend, his hands clasped on a book behind his dressing-gown, eyes heavy with last night's vigil, a staid and measured gait, but cordial outholding of the hand to his friend.

Upon one of these occasions, when the child had grown to be a big girl entering upon the first of her teens, the pastor

came with a piece of news, and as it was but once in a decade that such was gathered in the village, much was made of the startling rumour. A charming cottage, long untenanted, was let at last! A widow-lady and her son had driven over from Brighton, had been prepossessed by the flower-clustered home and had taken it! To the pastor, to whom every house was like a living being, this was an event of importance; but the scholar heard and soon forgot, when deep in the books and distant with the dead. Not so the girl, to whom it was scarcely less interesting than to the pastor, and whose sympathies were quickly aroused when her friend dwelt on the lady-like yet sad grace of the new tenant, and the pretty manners and gentle speech of her son.

The cottage was prepared, the pastor himself often looking in and giving a hint here and there conducive to the comfort of the coming inmates.

The humble, but well-bred occupants arrived upon the appointed day. Of course the village stood on the door-step, and worthy dames stared as they had not done since a real huntsman galloped through. A keen watch was set all day between the bottles of sticky sweets, and boot and stay laces were clustered thicker to admit of a peephole for espionage. The smith dropped a hoof, a thing unknown since his apprentice days. The sexton cast his sharp ferret eyes over his muslin blind, and set to a calculating the length of the widow. The farmers' men touched hats with rough courtesy, and their masters eyed the handsome, anxious face of the mother with kindly deference. The farmers' daughters slipped on their garden hats, and took baskets strangely near the pathway-palings in quest of straggling roses. The village children, grouped, finger in mouth, seemed transfixed. The aged, basking in the sun flooding their porches, invoked a blessing upon the lady, who, they read with instinct rather than dim eyes, had passed through the ordeal of woe.

The pastor, with infinite thoughtfulness, received them in the porch, and the lady's mournful eyes lighted with gratitude at the mark of sociable attention, but that no misunderstanding might arise, she respectfully informed him that they were

Dissenters. He would have preferred it otherwise, but took it comfortably, merely remarking there was no place of Congregational worship nearer than Brighton, a great inconvenience, and any time when they cared to drop in at the church, his pew was at their disposal. He was none the less kind and courtly, and was rewarded sometimes upon wet days by seeing the pair the most reverent of all his flock. This was preferable to the course adopted by the master of the Bishop's House, who never went anywhere.

As time passed it was remarked that the new tenants were very retiring. Poor, they lived with economy; it was not convenient to receive people back again, so they did not visit; even the pastor's kindly invitation to tea was declined, with thanks that were deep, but diffident.

The boy, like his mother, was possessed of much delicate beauty. Her husband, a Congregational minister, worked to death, left nothing but this pale, thoughtful boy of some thirteen years; the mother's slender income was their sole support.

The pastor spoke of them at the Bishop's House, and the student came off Copernicus, heard, and forgot the next moment; but Golden-hair, who had more earth than stars in her composition, became curious.

Strolling upon the downs one day, reading as usual, our student nearly walked over a lady sitting upon a camp-stool. He apologized. "So abstracted—ten thousand pardons—get absorbed in book; dear me—your son? Surely my neighbours—very glad to have met you—good morning, good morning!" Then turning back after a few paces to the lazy boy risen abashed from the sward, "Run in my house whenever agreeable—books you may like—it will be dull here after the town! Morning, your servant, madam!" raising the old worn felt-hat with the grace of the *ancienne noblesse*.

They each thought differently of him; the lady reading austere sensitiveness in the nature, the boy a majesty of learning compensating for any sign of brusqueness. The bent form became distant on the ridge of hills, ever the same brooding intentness, the same rapt departure from surroundings;

the gaunt form stood on the rim of the circle before descending the slope; the sea, the sky, infinitude, and that singular form in relief.

"How the man must have suffered!" said the lady to herself. "That is no mere love of learning, rather the refuge to which he has flown wounded."

"What are you thinking of, Mamma?" asks the boy, stretched again lazily upon the grass, sunset flushing a Lance-like bloom upon his cheeks.

"That, after all, we may be dull here. I am not sure that it is well for you!"

"But our kind friend has proposed a remedy, dear. What books there must be in that old place! Let us call, Mamma!"

And he gained his point, as usual; poor fragile refuser, with nothing in all the world to love save this young pleader, and he was her world!

The boy was so enamoured of reading, that he would not allow a day to elapse without accepting the gracious invitation, and something told him these abstracted ones are apt to forget permissions.

The servant conducted the visitor to the study, vacant at the time, but to which came Golden-hair, with considerable confidence, to see what the boy was like; he might be ill some day, and she have to carry jellies to the cottage; and she found him like—very like—a dim poetic sort of ideal she had taken the trouble to conceive when mixing with the shock-headed youngsters of her sphere of usefulness; a trifle shy, perhaps, but that was becoming, and she had no ideal of a bold boy, he must be gentle of manner, soft of tone, tender of touch; her brusque Papa had proved sufficient acquaintance with the other school. She did not know what to say, so said,—

"I hope your Mamma will like our village!"

Whereat the boy, who always spoke the truth, replied with innocent candour,—

"Mamma does not like villages; we are here because, being poor, we can live cheaper; neither does Mamma like Sussex, but poor Papa laboured in the county, and Mamma will not leave it; he loved it."

"Now, my Papa hates every place alike, isn't that dreadful? Except on the top of those windy old hills, and there he seems all right."

The boy came to think the girl very winning, and the village seemed less dull already when seen by the light of this fair young face. Soon they were good friends enough, and her playful words awoke that smile none ever could resist—the old, wonderful smile that upon the face of his poor dead father had won the people, making the Word seem sweeter from those lips. And Golden-hair smiled back, when a footstep approached, and the master, with his pale lined face, stood in the doorway; a roll of manuscripts in his hand, a book under his arm, and stooping slightly.

Eyeing the two from below the shaggy brows he muttered,—

"Been here long?"

The salutation was abrupt, but the boy was not taken aback, and answered, quietly and with much respect,—

"I have but just come, sir; my mother's compliments, and she trusts you will forgive the liberty of my calling."

"Ah, certainly; I'm not partial to callers—hate 'em; but, if I remember aright, I said you could just look in. You'd like a book or two? Violet, child, you can run and play; close the door carefully, my darling, and request the girls to see to that kitchen-door; it jars the whole house! They fancy my nerves were made by the smith!" to the visitor, while Violet retired with a little expression of regret and admiring adieu-glances.

The skeleton knees of the scholar knocked together; he sat back in a high carved chair, clutching at the dressing-gown with convulsive movement; his actions were expressively suggestive of unrest and disquiet. He turned to the boy standing by the table.

"Fond of reading?"

"Very, sir; my father was a great reader, and taught me to love books; he used to say they would, through life, prove my best and truest friends."

The answer seemed to please the student, who looked at the speaker with new interest.

"So your father liked books? Poor devil! And you take after him? Sorry for you, give it up—take to the plough, counter, desk. Look at these people's rosy cheeks about here; no books, sir; the happiest-going are those without minds."

Spite of this severe advice, the white hand was unconsciously patting the volumes strewn about the table, with a movement more significant than any expressed fondness. At this moment a door somewhere interior closed smartly; the master bounded with a cry,—"Bless me!—curse of my life that door-banging. I like the hills—no doors!"

The boy began to feel slightly uncomfortable and nervous himself; he edged a little away from the table.

"Be careful—hat going to tumble!"

The visitor placed his hat in a secure position, and the master, as if coming from out a reverie continued,—

"Father something in the preaching way, I think?"

"A minister; sir," with cheeks all crimson for the honour of the dead darling, tremulous cadence, downcast eyes, and a shadow upon the beautiful features.

The bookworm noticed it all, but went on with his withering cynicism. The boy was creeping into his heart; he would have none of it, and posted sentinels to guard the musty hermit-niche.

"I suppose, looking after other people's souls, he neglected his own body—more fool he! Clergy want to be web-footed and rhinoceros-skinned in parish districts. Pray be careful with your elbow there, or that book will be down—know nothing worse than the crashing down of a big book, besides it's sacrilege!"

The visitor removed his elbow from its dangerous proximity with such meek subjection that the scholar was touched in spite of himself, but he routed the momentary weakness.

"Hope you are not going to walk up that path always when you go out," (this was the one path of the ascent, in view of the windows); "it fidgets one; and if you read you'll crawl up like a snail."

The boy smiled, and very sweetly expressed his willingness to avoid the path indicated. The smile sank like a sunbeam,

and the old man went after it with a pick and rooted it out, flayed it, trampled it, quenched it; he was not going to give way to the weaknesses of other frivolous folk, fickle-minded, empty-headed; he looked as sour as it was possible to look, and just nipped that smile like a frost.

Rising from his high-backed throne, he nodded to a vast array of crammed book-shelves.

"Take any of them—bring back when read, and exchange for others—if—if the study is vacant." This with a narrow lightning-glance that caused the stranger to wince, although it would have been difficult to tell why.

"The lady with you yesterday, your mother, I presume? Don't know much of mothers, but suppose she's proud of you; tell her I counsel giving up all such foolish nonsense; you're neither better nor worse than other sons, and are likely to become rather worse."

Although startled, the boy manifested no annoyance at the tone adopted by his host; looking up in the rigid face with a mute forgiveness, he was about to rise for departure, when,—

"You'll mind the chair doesn't creak if you're going to get up; it's horrible! Next to the unearthly clatter of fire-irons, I know of nothing more irritating!"

The boy arose with every care, so softly never a sound was heard; then the scholar muttered,—

"I do hate that cat-like movement! It's just how the girls go about the house; one never knows when one's coming upon them or where they'll turn up next—keeps one in a state of chronic nervousness."

He strode the chamber, still convulsively clutching at his gown; then with a gasp he confronted the boy, who receded a step.

"I wish you'd break yourself of that smile you have! I can't bear people always smiling, it's a senseless habit; all very well during some playhouse comedy, but in private life it's frivolity, sir, frivolity!" The smile died away, but the same pleasant look remained, as though irradiating from within. The scholar softened a shade. "I was going to say, take your mother a few flowers from the garden—no message,

mind; messages are ridiculous, and—and—tell her it spoils a landscape sitting about on camp-stools—knew there was something I wanted to say—try the sea line, more healthy!"

At this moment the singular man swooped down upon a piece of ribbon, a bow of Violet's; he caught and clutched it, fiercely, the talon-like fingers meeting upon the relic, while he muttered to himself. Thrusting it in one of the pockets of his gown, he turned sharply, saying,—

"Good morning!" Marching with jerky abruptness to the door, which he opened as in a house of the dead, and with a rattling sort of gliding passed to the passage, and to the breakfast-room, where his girl sat on a hassock by the fire dressing a doll. He stood on the hearth-rug, erect in his woven glow of hap-hazard colour, while she looked up in his face wistfully, yearning for a smile where never a smile shone.

"You like your doll as much as ever, eh?"

There was something so inexpressibly solicitous she was surprised at the new interest, and arose, twining arms about the cold, gaunt, loveless man.

"Quite, Papa, dear! I'm a little girl still, you know!"

"Don't romp about as you used," grumbled the old man, "no running on the landing, and up and down stairs."

"You said you couldn't bear the noise, Papa!"

"Ah! Did I? I'd forgotten. Like the old coloured picture-books still, Violet?"

"Oh, yes, Papa! I shall always love the dear old pictures."

At that he turned upon her surly as a bear.

"Nothing was said about love, I believe; not aware I mentioned the word!"

"I'm sure, Papa, I—"

"Nonsense! Ridiculous, applying the word to books!" (This from the man that had been all love for the books, and for the books alone.) "Do you know why I removed from London, child, while you were but demi-folio, so to speak? It was to live quiet; vehicles jarred upon me, boys and girls jarred upon me, men and women jarred upon me, and now the

quiet retreat I've buried myself in is to be run over by a troop; the village ought to have a fence round; I wish I'd bought that tumble-down cottage. But rare editions get to such a price, and run up so, I haven't a pound to spare unnecessarily—you'll have those fire-irons down if you don't mind; of all discords on God's earth there's nothing comes up to the clatter of poker and tongs!" Here the master paused to ring the bell violently, and upon the appearance of a sphinx-like domestic, he grumbled,

"There's a door outside—stable or wash-house—creaking like the gibbet; have it off the hinges. And the old spout above this window, jangle and drip, jangle and drip, there is nothing I do think comes up to an old water-spout for giving one the horrors. That'll do. I think you've your fingers entangled in my girdle, Violet—it's jerking me, I can't bear to be jerked—where was I? Oh, going to say, don't use the study; no books there to interest you; dull room, and carpet gone threadbare from the traffic; keep out, there's a good girl!" and he patted her much in the graceful fashion of an Esquimaux patting his reindeer, and trotted his bony frame round the table, and out at the door, and up the great gloomy stairs to the den, heavy and dim, above. A fire was burning in the grate; he drew up a chair, as though about to cleave it asunder, then shivered and shrank at his own noise, and finally planted the slipper soles on the top bar, staring in the fire and muttering, until two fiend coals portrayed the faces of that boy and girl, when he sledged back as though wolf-bitten, and swung over to the lattice which he thrust apart and pushed his head out for the cool reviving air, and saw below that very boy and girl a-gathering pompons.

He just lifted one of his volumes, a book of medium bulk, and sent it swift at curly-head, who was bending gallantly to the proffered bunch of red and white buttons, and would have crunched it like a snail, but that mathematics overweighted and fell flat to the gravel; whereon he regretted adding worse to bad, for the book was precious, but, being the largest to hand, impulse had cannoned.

Then he rang the bell furiously, and scoured over to the

window again, to find his youthful lordship turning over the leaves of that volume with evident interest, and thinking, no doubt, it had been graciously despatched according to custom of the country, for his especial edification. He looked up to the irate face, smiled the fair smile again, lifted his cap of seal-skin with winning grace, gleaned up the pompons, and disappeared, with the book under his arm. Vanished, with such a chronicle for the pale lady mother, who took the head of curls between her hands, and looked wistfully down to the depth of eyes. The curls tossed a little under the scrutiny, but she held the fair brow firm.

"Look at me; up in my face, love!"

He was in her favourite attitude, upon a hassock at her feet. He looked up candidly enough.

"Do you feel inclined to go to the great house very often, my boy?"

"No, Mamma. Why?"

"I fancied, from the warmth of your description, that the attraction was great."

He coloured at that, but answered wisely,—

"I am fond of flowers, and fonder still of books; you know it, dear!" looking reproachfully.

"I should feel glad for you to find both elsewhere."

"Why, Mamma, I was only thinking while walking home, of the boon our neighbour's kindness had opened up to us, but if you are unwilling, I will never go near the place again!"

"There spoke my own brave boy! Thanks, darling. You know I have but you in all the world; let us keep to one another, and in each other's love and companionship experience the enjoyment of old. We are poor, but I will contrive to spare something from the housekeeping to procure you books; our little garden shall be gay with these late blossoms. From what you tell me of the owner of yonder mansion, I believe he far from welcomes your intrusion; he invited you upon the impulse of the moment; you see how painfully impulsive he is; such men are very kind—unthinkingly; even hospitable—unconsciously; but equally sensitive, morbidly so,

and in afterthought inclined to regret expressions their excitable nature dictated. You have not gone too far to recede. There, there, my boy, you are not sorry because I have spoken? Kiss me, and let your mother stand before the strangers. We will return these books by the good pastor; he will oblige us by presenting our thanks and apology, he is very good."

The old man looked in during the afternoon, just to see how they were getting on, he said, with pleasant cordiality. The lady was upstairs dressing; her son made way by the fire for the welcome visitor. After greeting,—

"Well, sir, and how do you like our learned patron?"

"Not much!" answered the boy, with refreshing candour.

"Ah! you think him dry and unsociable—it comes of living alone with the old books!"

"Not quite alone!"

"So, so, thinking of ladybird?"

The boy moved restlessly, half angrily, then bowed.

"If the little girl cannot make him sociable, I think nobody can! He really wants pelting with love and attention. Mamma doesn't approve, or I'd do it myself!"

The pastor looked in mute astonishment upon the youthful knight.

"You think he needs wooing from his books!" Then, with a sly twinkle, "I understand, *you* want to get upon more intimate footing, and I am to manage it, is it not so?"

"Quite the reverse, we intended trespassing upon your kindness to the extent of asking you to favour us by returning these books!"

The visitor looked chagrined at that, but made no further comment, for the lady at the moment entered, elegant in quiet afternoon attire.

"I hope you are well to-day, my dear madam?" extending a hand brown with garden work and gloveless expeditions on the downs.

"Yes, thank you, and invigorated by your bracing air already."

"Our friend of the Bishop's House speaks highly of the air!"

The lady bowed, almost coldly, not to be drawn into talking of that saturnine personage. The young gentleman poked the fire. The pastor coughed, thinking he did not understand Dissenters. The lady volunteered upon the once-for-all principle, but with such sweet composure that it disarmed surprise,—

"You will quite understand that when we took this little place we were indifferent to our neighbours; we would remain so still; the family you allude to are no more to us than the fishers in the miserable cottages on the outskirts of your village, not so much in fact!"

"Bless my soul!" murmured the conservative divine, bringing his hand down upon the clerical broadcloth like a veritable father of the church and the state.

"I have had enough to do with literary and intellectual people," continued the lady, "to know that they shun intrusion and avoid strangers; your friend's manners and messages prove him no exception. We, on our part, are unable to return hospitality, our means will not admit of it; we also like to be very quiet and to keep to ourselves, therefore you will appreciate my seeming uncouthness, and pardon that which is so suggestive of ingratitude."

The old man bowed, then with a pleasant smile,—

"At all events you will permit *me* to call now and then, to see if I can serve you in any way?"

She extended her hand, so glad he had not taken offence. Turning to her boy,—

"Run and fetch poor Papa's portrait from my room, dear!" and he went, on the instant, and had no sooner gone than she hastily confided,—

"He is growing—there is a girl, the child already interests him—quite natural, I know, but I would guard him from it; neither your friend nor I can afford to lose our darlings!"

And he understood, replying by a look that made them friends for life.

He soon returned with the portrait of poor Papa. Only a photograph taken one day when he had felt so weak and ill, that he feared lest the tried life should vanish and no shadow be left them; neglecting meanwhile the dinner his faithful wife had been so careful to enjoin he should not forget.

It was a characteristic study, the old Episcopalian gingerly handling the card, looking upon the broad forehead and handsome features of the talented, unpaid, unencouraged one, whose fair promising life had consumed itself upon its altar; then looking over the rim of his glasses and catching the eyes of the boy so like, and that wonderful smile so precious to the mother who treasured smiling days as jewel-studded, made note of in the pages of a poor little shilling diary, repeated year by year and growing fewer and fewer as the living face formed and grew like to the dead.

The pastor took the books himself in the evening, after tea.

The student sat near a green-shaded lamp, writing on days far back in past centuries. The pastor opened the door softly, then finding it unheard (not a door of the Bishop's House made a noise upon opening), and seeing the Master so intently engaged retreated, closing it with equal softness, and made for that cozy little room where Violet sat, alone as usual, drawn up to the fire, but happy with her cat and work. The charm of this picture following so closely upon the grim and studious interior he had just left, visibly impressed the quiet on-looker, who stood enjoying it some few minutes before speaking. The soft light of a lamp shed a halo about the tresses not yet turned, like the leaves, to sober colouring. Stooping above the work, her beauty had never seemed of more gentle mould, its fresh colour wooed forth of the fire, settling like a bloom that one feared must vanish from the cheek were the graceful head to lift, the dark eye-lashes being a foil of shading in symmetry with the lines of thought.

"I would not disturb your Papa, and came to you first, Fairy. Are you quite well, little one?"

"Very well, thank you, and so glad you are come! Papa has been at that horrid writing ever since tea-time. Do you know I sometimes think I will hide all his papers! Now tell

me the news. Is little Tommy Styles better of his cold? And did poor old Mrs. Muggeridge like the honey? And how —is—the—lady—at the cottage?"

"Getting settled, Violet, thank you; and Dame Styles desires her very grateful thanks, and Tommy is decidedly better of his cold."

"Were—the—pompons—liked?" She was busy, bent over a refractory knot, and tugged that wool as though to stretch it from thence away to Berlin. And the Pastor watched the operation with a curious expression, coming closer and stooping with a hand on each knee; and she knew, and the little fingers fumbled more awkwardly still. At last, feeling foolishly confused, she ventured to look up, and meeting the kind inquiring eyes of him more father than her own, just sprang into the open arms and buried her blushes in his beard.

"Naughty girl!" came very kindly, while he patted the tresses. "To be fluttered about a few pompons! Yes, they are liked, and are in the best vases, let that content thee. And now I am going to tell you a very brief fairy-tale, you have not had one for a long time. Don't you remember the winter-evening stories of last year?"

"Yes; the dear old stories!" And the girl clasped her hands, looking thoughtfully into the fire as though one or other of them had come true since then.

"Ay, there was one I never told—I waited a seasonable opportunity; it is frosty to-night, and the time will do. There was a girl, Violet, who lived away in a flower-village amidst the hills, and her Papa was chief noble of the country-side. They lived in an old château, beyond the village a little, and where the road wound onwards to the coast. A stern, proud, and scholarly man; this was his dream—to live apart from the false and fickle world, and devote his days to books and the culture of his daughter. His love for her passed fathoming, it was so deep and sacred; yet his nature, taciturn and reserved, never betrayed the secret, and the most critical of their neighbours never dreamt that the stern man loved his girl with any such wondrous passion. It came to pass that strangers from the city of the hills came to dwell within

the village. A vacant châlet almost under foliage of the trees girting the lordly pile, was their humble home: a lady and her son, a mere boy, but well favoured, and seeming all the more so in a little village where uncomely faces of the country folk were all to look on year by year."

He felt a trembling at his knee, and the small fingers creeping upward to his shoulder, but never a word was spoken. He went on, merciless; doing this for his old friend, who he knew could never have done it for himself.

"Well, Violet, the girl saw these, and was attracted by the ruddy beauty and clustering curls of the boy, and still more by the courteous ways, which, acquired of town life and the schools, and aided by grace that came of gentle parentage, were likely to entrap the thoughts of such as her. And as the days went on she grew to think still more of one, who at a change of scene would quite forget her. Papa, with breaking heart, remarking less of love for him, would muse on it, fretting, but saying no word of all his fears to her. You are a big girl, dear, now, and have read in the old romances of a sweetmeat stuff the young amuse themselves with in idle hours called Love; a mischievous thing it is, and destitute alike of sense and reason. So this girl of my story went knocking her head against that stupidness, and thought it mighty fine, I doubt not; but a fairy, who loved this little lady, stepped upon the scene, and made a picture pass before her eyes, of a sleek and lovely tiger, with soft and fawning ways, crouching to be admired: and of herself passing with Papa, who tried to hold her back, but from whom she broke away to pat and caress that tiger, which turned and gobbled her up, and stole off to lie in wait for a similar meal; but this was not all, for it caused the death of poor Papa, who could not live without his darling."

The attentive listener drew a long breath, looking into the clear coals, at the moral may-be; then just turned to wind arms around the story-teller's neck.

And in the study.

No sooner had the door closed upon the pastor than the writer laid down his pen, arose electrically, glided over to the

door, and with bowed head listened: keen as a hound, he knew the step, and the destination. Fidgety, hesitative, thinking to join them in the other room, thinking he could not spare the time, looking wistfully back to the writing, then down upon the crimson carpet problems spreading at his feet, then up to the gloomy panels of the door, and finally gliding back in three paces to his manuscript, muttering,—

"Why can't he come in the afternoon instead of crawling about just as I'm sitting down to my work? It disturbs one; I don't care for Violet's being there with him, her place is with me; if I go in, never return to the desk with the same freshness, bothers me—very much!"

He tried to write, but those Egyptian ethics seemed crisp, dry as mummy-casings. His thoughts wandered from dead and withered Cheops to the sweet-faced daughter in yonder room, who, for all he knew, might be lavishing upon another the caresses he had always put from him, not because they were unwelcome, but that he really had not time; the vaulted dead of all the centuries seemed always waiting to entice him to their cold company.

He placed the pen straight again—he was careful with that pen, he could not tell the years he had used the holder, and could not have brought his thumb firm to another. Then he trotted over the room again and out into the passage, and took measured, ghostly strides below the flickering lamp, suspended in the centre of the hall. The space struck chill, he shivered a little, and opened the other door, so quietly that neither knew; saw his girl, to whom he was icicle-father, playing daughter to the church, and became colder still, waxing mildly, frostily irritable; and then he heard enough of the fairy lesson to melt with a great, grand sorrow; and heard this, from Violet, looking into the crackling fire,—

"Oh, if Papa would only let me love him, I should never want to love anybody more—never—never—never!"

And he retreated before it. Back to his high walls of learning, his piles of thought and pillars of dry wisdom; but all the place was dreary and dark, and he shuddered at his own gaunt shadow on the floor. How the words echoed,

thrilled, seemed to drag him from out himself, and show him the grim, unlovely soul he was! He paced the crimson carpet, hands clasped behind: a bronze Homer in the corner frowned at the neophyte, dingy lines of volumes linked a reproach, foolscap on the table seemed to seathe with lightning enmity at his wavering; then, lo—a sign: a fine stuffed owl, the emblem of his faith, placed with the books lofty above the antlers, toppled and fell. It was by no supernatural aid; simply the wind which scoured from over the Downs as though on chase for stars across the sea; and the casements and the chimneys of the old house rattled with weird defiance of the Master's nerves, and winds within like imprisoned furies howled and shrieked and whistled and moaned the length of the lonely corridor, trying hard to join the riotous crew assailing the walls without; and together they made such a commotion he did not wonder much that his poor old owl had toppled over. Still it looked so very like disgust, and he stood over it pen in hand, listening dolorously to the noise, unwilling to touch or leave it.

Midst of which the pastor entered, benevolent of face, gentle of mien, and could not quite understand the student standing something like a mourner, but at last came up with the catastrophe, upon which he looked half-comically.

"What! is the old bird gone?"

He knew that old bird by long experience, had often glanced at it with ludicrous respect, longing perhaps to send a book at its roost, so imperturbable was its provoking stony wisdom.

"Hush—sh!"

The Master leaned over his favourite, and carefully raised the dust-thick plumage, holding it forth and looking into the eyes as though to read his course.

"Is it an omen?" In breathless undertone.

"Of nothing—save that the old house wants repairing, and you want rest. Go to Brighton, or better still to London, for a change, and permit the masons and carpenters to come in; it will do you and Fairy good; what with crotchets and study, fidgets and nerves, you are half beside yourself. Shake the

whole off, and it will be but just in time: forgive my freedom —you know me!"

The Master looked up dazed, such iconoclasm took his breath away; half an hour ago he would have resented it finely, now he received it with a sort of moody indifference. The pastor could tell by clutching of the gown that some struggle was in progress, those nervously-twitching fingers were so expressive, and he went back to Violet, to whom he said a few words in a low voice.

The child ran forth, and gently entered the sacred place where the tall man was wiping dust from the dishevelled plumage. Winding her arms about him, she lisped with cunning prattle, "Love *me* now, Papa!"

At which a wonderful light passed over his face, great gleams of joy, and flashings of quick pain: quietly, with much grace and control, he placed the bird upon his manuscript, turned the lamp low, and then opened his arms and embraced her fondly.

This little event was never forgotten by either of those immediately concerned. It was not alluded to, but its good effect was visible in the fact that the student gave up much more of his time to his child than as heretofore to his abstruse studies.

Sometimes Bertie Evans and Violet Hamilton met, but it was always in the company of their parents, who interchanged civilities and pursued their separate walks.

Great was the excitement in Hawkingdean when it was known that the other old house, closed for so long, had become possessed of a tenant; still greater when this tenant was found to be the eminent preacher whose fame had somehow penetrated even to this out-of-the-way place. The Moated Grange had been purchased, it was said, by this great man, and much good was expected of it by the poor, who tidied up their places, clean-bibbed their urchins, expended a trifle upon chintz at the general store to new curtain the windows, and cleared away long-standing rubbish in odd corners.

There could be no doubt the fortunate news was correct,

for the whole house had been well prepared and in part refurnished, although, it was believed, in somewhat humble fashion. Anon the housekeeper was known to have come, "quite a lady" (the village declared), and a couple of servants, very kind-looking girls, it was said; and shortly afterwards it was rumoured that the great man himself was upon the scene, and strict watch was kept between the laces and bottles of sticky sweets. All the dames stood on all the door-steps and stared with wonder and admiration when he was seen coming down the street; they had not stared at a man so much since a real live huntsman in a scarlet coat passed through their village. The smith came leaning a brawny arm against the post of his shed, for it was something indeed to see so courtly-looking a person in the quiet street, talking freely and familiarly with all, a kind word and smile for each. The sexton's sharp eyes were actively employed while the gentleman passed, and he said to his blind grand-daughter, sitting silent by the fire, but thinking so much, "May-hap there's better times in store for the village; an' the winter may-be won't try us so, arter all!" So much said the new face amongst them.

Naturally the pastor called early, and warmly expressed his pleasure at the good fortune which had sent them such a neighbour; and these two being gentle creatures, both of them learned in and loving the same theology, kinsmen to one divinity, and warmed by the same charity, soon became good friends enough. Mr. Garland was equally in sympathy with the love of the breezy heights shared by the pastor and his friend of the Bishop's House. In Brighton Mr. Garland resided at a distance from the Downs; here he could be upon them instantly, and without having one hundred thousand pairs of eyes bent upon him on his way thither.

To such souls of all the English tracts these South Downs bespeak the infinitely sublime. The Poet and the Painter have loved them also with rare affection, while the equestrian holds the sixty miles of springy turf indented by these picturesque villages the most pleasant ground upon which to indulge his favourite exercise: still solitary as when in ancient days mer-

chants from distant parts landed upon these shores. The Southern men were favoured: barter with the nations landing on the coast gave an advantage to the Gallic race peopling these slopes, which, like the hunting-grounds of the red-skin, were the Elysian fields of the braves. Here they were born: upon these bracing heights grew to virile hardihood: here they gloried in the chase, and decked the long-tressed daughters of the tribes with trophies of their savage sport: here they were buried, upon the summit of the range of hills, eastward, face upward to the wide scroll of stars. Here Druids built rude altars, and on their nights of sacrifice slaughtered the flower of the youth, until the hill-sides ran red even to the sea. This priest of a later faith viewed the scene of those mystic rites with keen interest. No red fires now lighted up the heights, no discordant chant awoke an echo: the distant sheep-bells, the dog's warning bark, and a vast plateau seemingly given over to peace and solitude.

The pastoral swains had not always known peace; far back in past centuries men of the Downs and men of the Sea hereabout were in open rivalry. A great inundation had overwhelmed the Flemish coast, and the Flanders fishermen, (at that time considered the most daring upon the sea-board,) resorted hither in a colony. To-day they preserve in Bruges traditions inscribed on quaint parchment of the wonders worked by these men of their coast. We think of the Belgium of our day as chiefly remarkable for superb farming, a toy coast-line of some forty miles, a fine town celebrated for its manufacture of carpets and lace, a poem-like, old-world city, with a cathedral possessed of the loftiest tower in Europe and the finest painting in the world, and an intelligent race of people who appreciate the English as they are appreciated nowhere else upon the Continent; but at the time we write of, that coast-line was of great importance to the people, and its fishermen were much depended upon: these, with a sprinkling of the tillers of the soil, settled on our shores, and inaugurated a prosperity that produced jealousy and a fierce rivalry that existed for centuries. But it is different now, and peaceful everywhere: even that fair girl-child of the recluse, whom the country folk in un-

trained compliment loved to call the "Little Queen of the South Downs," might roam for a long walk by the sea safe from molestation. The days had passed when the wrecker, the buccaneer, and the smuggler made this a dangerous route; men of the haven were kind with a rough courtesy when they met her, and any of them would have imperilled life for the young beauty. Never would it be forgotten how once, when younger, gathering wild flowers with her maid, she strayed and was lost. The whole place turned out and gave the country side a searching, the like of which had not been seen since they hunted here for witches. It was evening, the Downs were draped with grey mist, and shadows crept along the slopes like giant forms aiding the quest: stars twinkled above the sea, lights shone from cottages of fishermen and herdsmen: all the roadways were bare and white, not a figure was to be seen: the men kindled torches, and in separate bands searched the dusky hills, while the women-folk turned out to watch the glimmering trail of lights, now up, now down, like a far-away procession of glow-worms. At last they found her; fast asleep, tired with wandering, but not afraid, she knew the hills too well to fear, knew that when morning came she would find the way back somehow: they found her with the pretty head pillowed on an old sheep which, as though conscious of the precious charge of this gentle lamb, was lying perfectly still; it had kept her company faithfully, kept her warm through the chilly, misty hours. Geoffrey Hamilton gave a purse of gold to the shepherd in charge, and purchased the meek-eyed animal for his little girl's especial pleasure; to the villagers who had found her he likewise gave a golden requital; the treasure he had been near to losing was restored, and what was all else compared with that?

Many a time had Mr. Garland walked over the Downs at night, but never once had he met a soul; men might see him take some shadowy road leading to the lonely hills, might see him return at dawn, but neither man nor woman did he meet all the time of that solitary journey. The peasantry love not these mystical solitudes after nightfall: there are strange stories current of bad deeds done therein,

and of an uncanny company said to hold congress at midnight, relics of those superstitious times we told of, when this was an amphitheatre of dark performances, or was said to be; fears of the supernatural order, fostered by the phenomenal effects of the night season. By evil spells, unholy incantations, and the grim ritual of necromancy, much ill was supposed to be wrought. It was an age that believed in witchcraft, that feared it, that bribed it, that crossed itself against it, and that burned it, but that could not root it out; in spite of it all, the witches held high carnival, and rode on broomsticks from Hawkingdean to Devil's Dyke in ghastly company, causing the fairies to scamper from their rings, and insects under the long stalks of grass to creep timorously away. We do but repeat the fireside faith of the age. The story did not stop at witches and their familiars; the peasantry will still tell of how the Evil One in person was once seen at sunset time, standing upon the upmost ridge in dark relief against the sky; was seen to descend towards the village, where awestruck watch was kept, while the men stuffed the chimney-place with sacks, laid the Bible down at the entrance, and pasted sheets of brown paper over the door at the back. A terrible time was passed: he was known to be about in the village, and nobody durst go out to see what he was up to!

So tremendous was the evil wrought by the South Down witches, that the Monks of Lewes Priory once proceeded in solemn procession, with crosses and candles, to the "Satanic Chasm," better known as the Devil's Dyke, where with great ceremony, in presence of a circle of scared rustics, the Downs were duly exorcised for the benefit of the shepherds. What with witches, priests, fairies, thieves, and the French, the sheep had a hard time of it.

Woe befell all maiden ladies who kept black cats! Those given to study and learning, were considered tainted, and were watched accordingly. Did cattle breed amiss, or crops fail: was there less sunshine, or more rainfall: it was set down to the class which did not study, and whose charm was its ignorance. Red-haired folk were looked upon with violent antipathy, black tresses were said to be directly imported

from Satan, and blonde ringlets were the certain insignia of fiend-bestowed attractiveness. The trail of snails on the front door, and the squabble of two drakes on the pond, especially if the wind blew the smoke a particular way, was proof emphatic! Altogether, although bewitching and enchanting times, rural existence at that day was decidedly a snare!

* * * * * *

Over these Downs had come a traveller, who, while standing upon the highermost ridge, his back to the setting sun, might have been painted for Lucifer himself; a tall and imperious being of mocking cast, black against the yellow-red sky, seemingly standing upon one of the summits of the earth, viewing the panorama of pastoral peace. This circle of hills, with its wide sweep from Beachy Head to Hampshire, pleased him vastly; it recalled the mighty grass-lands of Australia, where, by the way, if he had not been a particularly honoured individual, he had at least had breathing room, and had made the most of his space. With folded arms he stood looking over the undulating greensward, and a scornful curl of the lip rendered the face additionally sardonic.

"Sometimes I think sheep-farming out West is the only enjoyable existence. I did not want to return there, but, on my honour, the cares of diplomacy, the worry of commerce, the constant scrutiny requisite to keep the gentlemen in my employ up to the mark, the bother of mixing in society, the continual tax upon one's intellect, the awful drain upon one's genius, the fatigue of my seasons of royalty when with the tribes, the surveillance necessary to keep the people out of some confounded scrape or other, all come heavy upon one pair of shoulders, and I often think the life out there, notwithstanding its minimum of profit, presents the simple alternative between working to death and working to live. But, however, the work is not over here just yet."

Slowly descending the slope he entered the village, and in the twilight descried the glimmer of a light through the red curtain of an inn; it must be an inn, he thought, nothing else would present that roseate glow. As he ap-

proached, the light shone cheerily in the dusk. Looking round, he made his first acquaintance with Hawkingdean; shadowy trees, and the stretch of misty hillock; clusters of cottages, with delicious bits of garden, in many of which were fragrant roses; a pretty church that seemed to have crept into a niche of the great chalk range; some white palings that looked ghostly in the evening light; a pond that reflected back the grey; felled timber like the grim and silent witnesses after a battle; and that inn, quaintly built as some picturesque hostel of Holland. From the opening to the valley came sound of the sea at no great distance; its rumbling echoed along the cleft, and would have been heard with yet greater distinctness but for the wind scouring down from the hills. The traveller had not yet seen what he had come to see—the Moated Grange, and before entering the hostel he walked on farther through the village. He thought he had come upon it when the Bishop's House was reached, and he stood looking at the pile, which was gloomy enough to impress even this mysterious being. There was one light at the upper chamber where Geoffrey Hamilton was deep in study, with his daughter sitting beside the fire; and Noel Barnard, who had heard sufficient of the abstracted student to arouse his interest, contemplated the owl's nest with admiration and curiosity. He went on, passed Mrs. Evans's tasteful little house, and crossed an open space on which was a pond with some geese, and a line of linen-posts whereby the good wives dried their washing. He could smell the salt sea from this point; it was an unsheltered corner, open to the four winds of heaven, exposed to the Channel mists, often flooded by the water-courses amongst the hills, bared sullenly to the great showers that seemed to gather purposely for cleansing it; and here fittingly was the fisher colony—two rows of black and cheerless cottages, without gardens (nothing but shingle would grow hereabouts), without the picturesque and rural surroundings peculiar to English villages; only black walls, white door-steps, grey oyster-shells, and slate flints; but the inmates were happy and healthy. Slight kinship was there between the tillers of the land and the

"Then pushed off, and might well have been taken for the ghastly ferryman of Styx."—Page 307.

toilers of the sea; little enough had Hawkingdean folk heard of their ancestors, but here tradition was engrafted for all time.

"Come to the end of the world, I suppose!" said the traveller, turning with disrelish from the quarter.

In lieu of retracing his way, he took a narrow road between the yard and the uprearing grass-land and cultivated belongings of a farm. This brought him to a huge garden, girt in with iron palings. The trees and shrubs were so dense and thick within, that he could see nothing; but, walking round, his industry was rewarded by meeting with a gap where once a pathway had been, and to which an old iron gate, fast locked, gave ingress. Mr. Barnard's long legs relieved him at once of any impediment so far as barriers were concerned, and he was soon at the end of the deserted path, arriving at a flight of stone steps, slippery, and overgrown with moist weed, and washed by the water of a sluggish moat. The water was broad and black and unutterably dreary-looking, the tangled growth upon its banks afforded covert for numerous wild fowl undisturbed from year's end to year's end, broad lilies grew upon its surface, fiery-eyed creatures lurked within its hollows, and a weird haze seemed to envelope the whole neighbourhood. The broken, blackened column of an ancient water-arch was shadowy amidst the sedges below; moored to a rusty ring attached to a rotting post, was an old, disused boat; beyond the moat a garden wilderness, wild as though never trodden by human foot or tended by human hand; and rising up all shadowy and irregular, yet even thus, beautiful, the GRANGE.

"A queer place to become the possessor of," murmured the observer; "bought it cheap, I fancy; lively home for the housekeeper, if of nervous tendencies!"

He dragged the boat towards him with a vigorous pull, the staple gave way, and the sluggish water floated the lumbering craft to his feet. Feeling first if it contained water or was uncomfortably damp, and finding the latter to be the case, he brought from the bank a quantity of dry leaves and cushioned therewith the seat which he proposed to use; then pushed off,

and might well have been taken for the ghastly ferryman of Styx. His intention was to approach the building by the water-way, and ascertain how far the key handed him by his legal factotum served its purpose. Very slowly the bulky old craft floated round, the one oar stirring the water lazily and as if with reluctance. On either side, the creatures crouching in the black hollows and under the clumped bushes uttered the alarm-note to the tribes ahead, and mighty was the scampering up the banks. It is wondrous, the connexion of ideas. This goblin-like personage, seated in his lumbering boat, on the dusky water-way, disturbing the whole cordon of beast and reptile, makes this remark,—

"I wonder how my precious wife is getting on? Put her out rather, I fancy, that return of Helen's child. Shouldn't be surprised if Lindon gives Hortense her *congé!*"

Tranquilly the boat glided on, even to the broken arch of which O'Connor had spoken. Here were several steps, and above them the huge iron door. He secured the boat by tying its iron ring with his red and yellow pocket-handkerchief to a corresponding staple as on the other side. The door had not been unlocked for ages, and presented a work of some difficulty owing to the rust and encrusting of noisome excrescences. This forced open, a passage was before him, dark, damp and vault-like; hissing inmates darted past him over his boots, for the steps; fluttering creatures flew swift for the opening thus suddenly disclosed, fanning his face: whilst on the walls his hands encountered indescribable ones.

"An underground paradise!" he muttered; "I wonder what they charge for apartments hereabouts! Reminds me of my lively sensations when lost in the catacombs; guide thought I was done for; wasn't; turned up again, the richer by a magnificent diamond ring. Fond of exploring by myself, hate parties, so much irreverence and vulgarity, no respect for the ancient or historic; prevent interested research too! Stopping at Ghizeh, party starting for the Pyramids,—always make for Cheops, must have the most for their money,—*I* made for Mycerinus, quarter of the size, and nobody there. Went poking about in three or four quadrangular-shaped chambers; stationed

a black fellow outside; presently came upon a quadrangular-shaped stone, rather different to the rest, tools with me, hoisted it; coffer, inscribed with select Egyptian, and filled with rings, necklets, &c., once the adornment of some of my honoured forefathers. Great respect for their tombs. One of these days I'll try the Sphinx, have an idea it'll pay for the time! Shan't forget first view of her, seen upon a clear bright night: graceful head, clear cut, grey, flooded with the pale lustre, majestic expression, somewhat African, the mouth exquisite: overcome, I fell on the sand, and made obeisance to my royal ancestress. But this lively passage is uncommonly like one in those Alexandrian catacombs, although can't say the refreshing stream reminds me of the Mediterranean. But now to see what Ptolemy Lagus may be about."

Chattering to himself in this fashion whilst lighting his small pocket lantern, Mr. Barnard then softly applied his science in relation to mechanics, and opened the inner door. It admitted him to a cellar, and by natural transition Charon became transformed to Guido Fawkes. This underground storage-place was of large dimensions; in days of Cavalier troubles it had been used for other purposes than the bountiful stowing away of wines. Mr. Barnard did not stop here. The remaining door gave him but slight trouble. Beyond was a flight of steps, and he extinguished his light before mounting these, for he concluded they would conduct to one of the outer offices. They did, to a cold back kitchen, scrupulously avoided by the nervous domestics. He saw a light between the hinged jointing of a door, and cautiously peered through. Within was the servants' kitchen, where two maids were seated at a table, both on the high gossip, one working, the other staring hard and superstitiously at a huge snuff on the tallow-candle; and this one was saying, to Mr. Barnard's intense relish,—

"Depend on it, there's sum-mat wrong; look at it; my granny says whin-iver that shape is seen there's sum-mat uncanny stirring about. The sniffers is in the back-kitchen, but I no more dares go in for 'em than I dares go in the back-gardin for the horse-reddish to put on the supper-table. An'

that Miss Evelyn's as bold as a lion; only two nights sin' I seed her actually a-walking down by the moat, the moon a-shining, the snow a-fallin', and she like a sperrit, nothin' to do with which it's my belief and allus has been, the place is haunted. Jist hear the noises on windy nights!"

"Mrs. Mellerton used to say 'twas the passage leading to the moat, and the age of the old house!"

"Well, I knows it isn't pleasant living in a place where there's a passage leading to a moat, and if it wasn't for the wages, and for feeling all right when master's in the house, I couldn't stop. My granny has told me of them witches as she heerd on when a gal; sich tales as would make your 'air stand on hend! 'Betsy Jane,' she says to me, 'notice the smoke, and don't turn towards the Downs if it blows in the directshun of the Divil's Dyke,' nor more I don't."

"Young Master Evans told me such tales were idle talk and country gossip, and that we should not heed them; he's a nice, kind young gentleman."

"He may be, but shows his ignorance not believing in the witches; ask any o' th' folk in the village. I haven't lived here much, but granny has, and when she heerd as how I was to be under 'ousemaid at the Grange she jist lifts up her 'ands an' says, does that dear old 'oman, 'It'll be the joy o' my 'eart to have Betsy Jane so close agin me, but I'm sorry, I am, it's the Grange she's agoing to, it's allus borne a bad name, and dark's the deeds, I doubts, but 'ave bin done there.'"

The silent listener paused to hear no more of this edifying conversation: he knew already that Garland had arrived, that Constance Evelyn was an inmate of the house, and for the time being he was satisfied. He did not, as some coarse practical-joker might have done, maliciously make some horribly-sounding supernatural noise with the object of half-frightening these poor maids to death; but withdrew quietly enough to his water-stairs and boat and the gloomy channel.

Mr. Barnard having left all safe and secure behind him, with a satisfied smile betook him to the cosy, red-curtained little

inn. It was not a buxom landlady of the approved description who advanced to meet him, on the contrary it was a hostess whose buxomness was deficient, whose thinness and sharpness and tartness were of that order which demands much carbonate to make it palatable. In early life she had married Jabez Payne, and he had spent his savings upon buying this place for public entertainment. The worst of it was, nor man nor beast ever came that way to be entertained. The Grange was unoccupied, the pastor had his ale from a Lewes brewery, the genteel inhabitants of the village received it in bottled form from Brighton, the Master of the Bishop's House didn't drink, the farmers brewed their own, and the yokels (Mrs. Payne's word) only drank small beer, so that it was not a profitable or progressive speculation; and sorely at first did the good woman repine. A gentleman sportsman now and then, or a tourist party, would have enlivened business, but the village was so out of the route there were absolutely not even these to cater for. The house was pretty enough and comfortable, but then, as Mrs. Payne briefly remarked, "One doesn't care to marry into a public-house to find it a private one!" Jabez made a good husband so long as he lasted, but anon he was taken up the street to his last home, and the thin woman remained to await the patrons. She had worn down to an apathetic calmness, and had given up looking for the coming guest; even that solitary huntsman who had lost himself between the hills rode through without bestowing a look upon the sign. This last was a great blow, and after it the woman waxed quietly impervious, although not perceptibly decreasing in sourness. When Mrs. Payne saw the singular-looking yet distinguished visitor (whom for the moment she took to be a foreigner) enter her hostelry and affably request accommodation for a night or two, she distinctly felt within herself (as she afterwards said when communing with her maid upon the eventful circumstance) as though the long-waited-for had come. Altogether things seemed looking up in Hawkingdean; even the famous tenant of the Grange had given her an order for the ale required by his household. "A most polite attention!" Mrs. Payne said; so

true it is that one's reputation commences or closes at the ale-house. The fact was the Minister saw the state of affairs, the dead-alive stagnation of the place, and in his humble way would help; and it won for him a friend and well-wisher in this sour-looking landlady. Mrs. Payne's face assumed a gracious smile when the stranger solicited hospitality; yes, he could have every accommodation, should receive the best attention, would be very comfortable. Of that he expressed himself assured, and all being amicably arranged, he entered the parlour, where the smith, the sexton, and three or four others were just finishing the evening posset before going home to bed. All rose at the stranger's entrance: it was so uncommon an event, and this was so unusual-looking a personage, that he was received with much deference.

"Good evening, friends—hope all are well—glad to meet you! Pretty place, this—bracing hills—one or two fine old houses! Can I offer you some tobacco, sir? And (to another) I'll trouble *you* for a light!"

They were much taken by his free-and-easy manners and were sociable enough, inviting him to join them in a quart of half-and-half. The friendly stranger explained that in his country it was usual for the new-comer to stand treat, and said he should feel pleasure doing so: whereat the smith said he saw the instant he entered the parlour that he was a gentleman, and the sexton rapped on the table with his knuckles in corroborative approval. When the glasses had been duly replenished one of the company brought out an old box of dominoes (pleasures were simple in this Arcadian vale), and very soon the sport ran high, tongues wagging like threshing-machines, on a variety of rural topics, of particular interest to Mr. Noel Barnard, who was agreeably enlightened respecting the private and family matters of shorthorn cows, fat hogs, Southdown sheep, cart stallions, harness nags and cobs, Jersey cattle, and other stock; also upon agricultural details such as the all-important subject of manure, one gentleman affirming barley manure to be useless thereabouts, another deciding there was no raising beans without it. One of the speakers had tried top-dressing, and found it satisfactory, and turned to the visitor, "You're in favour

of top-dressing, sir?" "I—oh, very much so!" and harmony still prevailed, the domino contest included, despite the excitement of the sexton, who had made a run with double-blank three times in succession, such a thing as had never happened to him all the time he had played dominoes. Soon the discussion turned to implements—broadshare, drill, plough, harrow, roll, oil-cake breaker, hurdles, troughs, pulpers, and chaff-cutters: and a respected yeoman, laying down his church-warden pipe, said to the visitor, "I hear there's a new chaff-cutter about sir, mayhap you've seen it?" "I think I have," said the artistic gentleman, with much civility; and then gently led the conversation in the direction of the village, concerning which, these good folk, never tiring of talking of what little there was to talk about, entertained him with the full account. First of the great preacher who had come to live amongst them, and some were loud in praise; some, busied watching the absorbing game, said nothing; the visitor in an impressive manner, remarked, "Why, surely this isn't the man who's been going on so queer with his curate's daughter! Same name, comes from Brighton, odd thing too! Sad affair, hushed up, can't appear in public. Poor girl, awfully sorry for her, never had a sister, but feel for her; dreadful thing!" Of course all were agog at this; commend us to a village for epicurism in such matters. The story was set going now, by the morrow it would be all over the village. The serpentine limbs of the artist coiled around the ash-trays under the table and closed while with grim setting of the teeth he looked the meaning he would not express by speech. The game was neglected, pipes were taken from mouths, the pewter tankards were put down, and the villagers stared without remark. At last the sexton, the wiseacre of the party spoke, "Well, if that's it, I think they might have stayed at Brighton! It's wonderful the wickedness about!"

"What's all this you tell me about the owner of the old house I passed coming into the village?" asked the guest.

"Measter Hamilton, full o' book larning; well, he's very peculiar, gruff and surly-like, but it comes o' always studying, leastways so we hear. He's mighty clever, they do say

knows every mortal thing; and it's rich too he is, has a power o' money, and don't hesitate to spend it. Some o' the big parcels that come to him from Brighton would make your eyes open: scientific instruments, we've been told. He's something of a philosopher, I think they call it, fond o' the wonderful, deals in mysteries, and reads the stars!"

"Bless my soul, so did my mother, very clever at it; know a thing or two myself; we shall get on well together. I'll call on the old fellow, be a charity I should think."

And they looked at this bold and confident stranger with a little wonder but with much respect, and said, "He's a curious sort of person to call on, he is!"

Shortly afterwards the company turned out and the guest was conducted to his chamber; a pleasant room, snowily clean, with a cheerful fire blazing away in the capacious grate.

The long-legged gentleman sat down, and warmed his feet.

"Guess I'll astonish this recluse, possibly get something out of him;" (Mr. Barnard always had an eye to business, it was in the blood). "Fond of the occult, is he? Good! A disciple of the marvellous? Better! An adept at the mysterious? I'll cap him! My Indian experience may come in here."

He next made a tour round his room, he wanted something to read awhile before this cheerful fire. He tried the top-drawer of the chest, it was locked; tried the next, it yielded; contents, a circular from a pig-trough maker, some shells, a short pipe, the handle of a whip, a reel of cotton, a fish-hook, a cough-lozenge, an old memorandum book, a thimble, a piece of slate-pencil, and a packet of seed. "Very interesting," having made an inventory; "glad they didn't lock this lot up? Well, what's the bid?" With much liveliness he tried the drawer below, and discovered one shawl, one black paramatta dress, one roll of crape flouncing, one cardboard box containing mourning-collars and cuffs, and one small box of black pins. "Poor soul!" said the commiserating Mr. Barnard, "lost her husband. Astonishing the number of souls I come across who *have* lost their husbands! Very depressing for me, very!" and with the oddest expression possible to conceive he shut the drawer up again. The in-

quirer turned his attention to the beauties of the side-table by the window: artificial flowers under a glass, model of a ship, and a small dog with two heads. Next to the mantel: facsimile, possibly, of the Southdown shepherd of the period wrought in china, his mate opposite with the nose off, and in the centre an old brown mug, pastoral period likewise. He then opened the window and leaned his head out.

All was very quiet, yet does a village never present the dead stillness of the country-town at night; there is always some faint sound, some sign of movement. Near by was a shed, in which the cattle were restless; the wind from over the hills and off the sea stirred the leaves and scattered the straw in the yards, pigeons made a low cooing; the strong-throated weasel, after corn and mice, uttered its curious squeak, the poultry-yard at the rear of the inn was fluttered; and in the distance was heard the solemn measure of the waves breaking upon the dusky shore. Those were the sounds: the sights were these. A village street, rows of low-pitched cottages, a few houses of a better order, the farmsteads, the two peaceful edifices—the village church, and the pastor's manse—and the great old house where the scholar dwelt, and where the sole light visible shone at the window of his study. "It would be interesting to know," thought the gazer, "how much our learned recluse will credit without doubting the word of a gentleman and a traveller! Also, if he is disposed to defray the cost of an expedition of enterprise?"

With a sanguine smile he turned from contemplation of the hushed scene, from the little settlement which, for its quaintness, might have come down from days of "Hawkynge" glory when "gentil knyghts" were equally at the service of the House of Lancaster for sport or for combat; when the downs and downland villages were picturesque with gay companies, with horses, dogs, and music. Now, the acres upon acres of wild flowers are all untrampled upon, except where the flocks dotting the hill-sides trail off for sweeter pasturage. The sweep of clear green space preserves its own records unwritten, save on the folding leaves of the one great book; no man has troubled to collect the archives of this realm

of the solitary herdsman; chroniclers are too busy with the towns, historic sites, and the ancient work of builder's hands.

Mr. Barnard arose early and went for a bracing walk along their ridges, having ordered his breakfast to be ready by half-past nine o'clock. It was piercingly cold upon the heights, a keen and cutting December wind smiting the hills as though to cleave them asunder. The vigorous pedestrian smiled good-humouredly in the face of it, and performed his constitutional to a rood, ay, and enjoyed it; returning at length, all aglow from one end of his long form to the other, and to find the village warmly sheltered even from December north-east winds. The sun was smiling full upon the little place, and a very different scene was presented to that of the preceding night. His inn peeped forth at one end of the street, lozenge-latticed, thick on the garden side with winter roses; JABEZ PAYNE, LICENSED, &c., over the door; a swinging sign bearing THE GRANGE INN, in discoloured art; to the rear he smelled pigs, saw Alderney cows, and heard a hound. Mr. Barnard slightly extended his walk; it wanted three minutes to the time appointed for his breakfast; he was very punctual always. "Cook the eggs a minute or two less if one goes in before the time," he used to say. A man was riding the foremost of a team down to the pond. The steady clang of iron on iron came from the smithy. The stranger walked down the street, and the village stared at the stranger; the stranger returned the compliment by staring at the village; the village had never been so stared at before, and went indoors again; the stranger pursued his way. He came to the fisher-colony; nets were hanging on the outer walls, boats were drawn up near by, conical baskets formed pyramids by the doors, grubby-mouthed young of the fisher-colony sported upon the oyster-shells and shingle. Thence he betook himself to the garden-gate of the Bishop's House, a romantic edifice by all lights: gabled, overrun with ivy, with dead gleaming of old red bricks put together when the Tudors played at art patronage. "Return after breakfast," said the artist, and went back to do justice to Mrs. Payne's liberal providing.

True to his word, he returned after breakfast, and galvanized

the elderly, low-speaking woman who appeared at his summons. She informed him that her master would see no one, and was deeply engaged.

"So am I," said Mr. Barnard, with a sly look at the decorous domestic, and placing a half-crown in her hand; "engaged to see Mr. Hamilton."

With much gravity she returned his guerdon, saying, "I will, if you please, tell my master you wish so particularly to see him;" and departed upon her errand, but presently returned to say her master knew nothing of the person's business; whatever it was, he must communicate it in writing.

"Right you are," said Mr. Barnard, and taking out his pocket-book, he tore therefrom a leaf, upon which he wrote this mystical announcement,—"*Eastern Traveller, twenty years incarcerated underground by hitherto unknown race, terrible story; recently arrived in England; would be obliged by an immediate audience.*" It seemed such a queer affair altogether, and it was so very possible the stranger *had* landed at Newhaven and walked over the Downs hither, that Mr. Hamilton gave permission for him to be admitted, and received him in the library, where a large fire lighted up the backs of solid walls of books and glimmered upon the scholar's rugged face, lending it a colour not its own.

"My scribbled mem.—very unceremonious, Mr. Hamilton—hope you'll excuse it; thought it might explain better than servant—like servants very much, but can't deliver messages. Heard of your profound learning—thought you would like to hear tremendous experience, of which I have been the victim, and that you might help me by advice, perhaps take sufficient interest to do something in it. Untold riches—fabulous wealth, plate your South Downs with gold from one end to the other!"

"Would you have any objection, sir, to lowering your voice, which may or may not be an unpleasant one, but which strikes me as singularly discordant? I hate voices."

"So do I, but we can't do without 'em—used to be worse—old German fellow just found out animals talked originally—awful jargon—fancy a field full of dairy-maids and cows!"

"You will excuse me, but do you mind talking slowly and as consecutively as possible? You will find the hills—"

"Know all about it—magnificent—been up there this morning—bird's-eye view of your house from the summit—very fine—'There,' said I, 'dwells one to whom learning is as a handmaiden!'"

He was stretching out his hands to the fire, his thin face came out profiled upon the books, he looked a thinker, he was decidedly eccentric; one way and another the recluse had not been so impressed of late years as upon this occasion. But his legs fidgeted Mr. Hamilton very much, for first one and then the other embraced the fire, then darted off in a tangent like javelins; and then they went together, as though both were going up the chimney; then one slipped somewhere under the chair, but where, was a problem, while the other glided under a table near: and all with such active and rhythmical spontaneity that the student thought this person must be all legs, and looked at him with considerable curiosity; at the same time it amazed him greatly, and he politely asked,—

"Do you think you could keep your legs still five minutes?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Barnard, "unless walking about all the time—born like it—when quite an infant skipped like a flea—bound to be a great traveller every one said—and public voice spake truth—been everywhere."

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, sir, and I'm a man of very few words, but you adopt an extravagant phraseology peculiarly offensive to me."

"Gift of the gab—I know—don't mind me—can't hurt my feelings—haven't got any. Tell you this story, slow as I can; won't take long—feel certain you'll move in the matter."

"It's doubtful if I shall ever be still again!" muttered Geoffrey Hamilton, with a morose look at the other's legs.

"I mean that you will move the Government; *I* can't—no influence—won't notice my letters—hard done by—subject of the Queen too—in some countries, you know, lead to a war; but to a man of pluck and some capital this offers inducement to take more than ordinary interest."

"I have neither, sir, and am not likely to aid your pro-

posals in any way. I avoid business and the busy; my object is to live retired."

"I won't trespass upon your studious privacy long; just hear what I've got to say, and tell me what you think afterwards." And, without waiting for permission, Mr. Barnard commenced one of those narratives of oriental extravagance in which he delighted; during which Mr. Hamilton sat, immeasurably astonished, while his visitor critically observed the effect of his powers of invention.

"Do you seriously wish me to believe the astounding, and to put it expressively, as it seems to me, lying relation I have just heard?" asked Mr. Hamilton.

"To be sure I do. Never mind expression; not surprised you speak out! What do you think my feelings can be?"

"I don't know what they have been, if you have gone through all that you describe; but it strikes me as being very like a piece of outrageous fiction."

"So it does me; so it would any one; but let somebody go there and prove it for the satisfaction of this country. There's an opening at Elephanta for inquiry, I do assure you. I don't present this before you as an interested person, as a poor person, or as a person wishing to conduct any investigation connected with the matter; I've had quite enough of it. I simply recount what has been, and what is, and I can only say I shall be happy, if anything is done in the matter, to subscribe, say 500*l.*, towards prosecuting a disinterested inquiry. This I will place in the hands of my solicitor, Mr. O'Connor, of Chancery Chambers, Cursitor Street, who will, I am sure, oblige me by receiving subscriptions to be paid in to the account of the Elephanta inquiry."

"What you have said, sir, sounds fair and reasonable. Perhaps you will give me your solicitor's address in writing?"

"Certainly, if you wish it." And the visitor wrote it down, Mr. Hamilton meantime thinking, possibly, the gentleman's experience might have had something to do with the chronic restlessness to which he seemed to be subject.

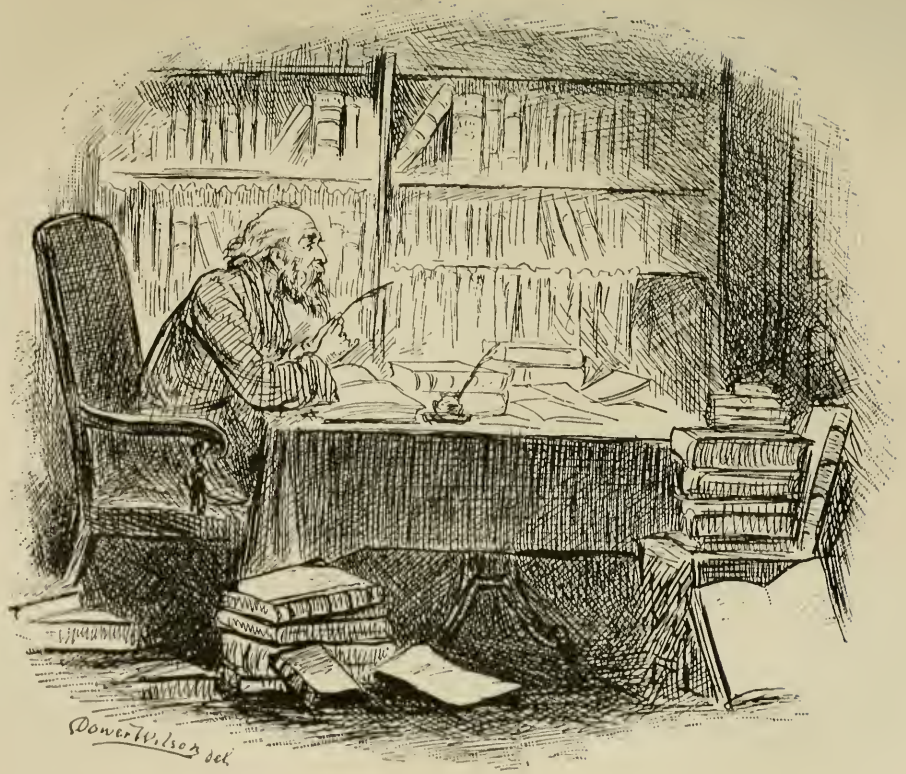
"I should think," said the gentleman, looking up carelessly, "if I give five hundred, and you give five hundred, we

might manage it between us, and retain the prestige, for if once it's known the initiative is taken, troops of adventurers will rush in and want to share the spoil."

"I'm not aware that I said I was going to do anything of the kind, sir!" and with an irritable movement the Master doubled the written paper, and put it in his pocket-book.

"Neither did I; these things want well looking at; so many men who can afford it better, and I think it's more their duty than either yours or mine, one of us with his learning, the other with his art, has quite enough to attend to; but I'll be off up the hill, I love these windy heights."

"I wish you good morning!" The student bowed abruptly, clutching nervously at his dressing-gown; and with an irregular jolt quitted the library. Proceeding to his private retreat above, while the decorous domestic opened the door for the stranger. Mr. Hamilton was very much annoyed. That any person should profane the retirement of the Bishop's House, and intrude upon his seclusion, for the purpose of imposing upon his credulity, seemed such an outrage as to be barely possible. On the other hand, the visitor's narrative had been so singular a jumble of Hindoo reality and fable, Mr. Hamilton could not restrain himself from falling into irritable consideration of its purport. In the usual old chair, lost in a reverie wherein scholarship and science blended, while the grim mythology of India seemed to loom upon the dusky walls; tiers of old books, lofty and massive, took rocky semblance, and by the vacant gaze through half-closed lids, grew like some giant deity of the cave-temples, of whose marvels and hidden treasures the person had talked until the recluse could scarcely sit under the infliction. The mystical traditions of the East had always a fascinating attraction for the enwrapt scholar, well versed in its ancient literatures. The visitor had woven imagery of his own with the rich colours of Indian romance, and hung the highly-wrought tapestry upon weird rocks of the colossal temples; and so vividly that Geoffrey Hamilton had almost been transported to those shadowy interiors, and stood in awe before the mighty achievements of primeval sculpture.



"In the usual old chair, lost in a reverie."—PAGE 320.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GRANGE FIRE-SIDE.

Hawkingdean Grange did not impress Constance Evelyn with the gloomy feelings other people regarded it with. There was a shadowy effect about it, but this to her represented the poetic, the historic, the romantic: not the superstitious. The recesses of the tangled garden, with the plantation thick with fir-trees and soft with dropped cones, was a beautiful retreat to this bright young spirit that had roamed the dusky fragrant ways of Bournemouth and Torquay. The Moat was a place of wonders; those giant reeds that smote each other with a cross-ways rhythm, the sullen water with its freightage of lilies and broad leaves, and trail of attendant weed, the wild fowl that flew from her approach, the dismantled water-gate and arch with its festooned ivy and bindweed, were all very beautiful, and, when she had overcome the sense of loneliness, most pleasant. She had not devoted time to reading poetry or romances—Mr. Evelyn considered both unfitted for the conscientious training of a clergyman's daughter—but she possessed the love of both as developed by nature and in age. This wild deserted place was lovely in her eyes, and here opened the dream-time that comes but once in life.

There was a startling measure of happiness about this coming to Hawkingdean, and since unable to quit it she lived forth the dream with such pure delight as only those know who are unspoilt by the world and humanity as was Constance Evelyn. She had resisted it, struggled against any such possibility as this, would have fled from the destiny which was enveloping her, but whither? She tried to be cold with him,

but what was coldness opposed to such infinite tenderness as was his? She sought to assume indifference if not dislike, but what hollow acting it must seem and how despicable she must appear in his eyes, she feared. It was useless; it was impossible. They met in the comfortable old-fashioned drawing-room; she was at needle-work when he arrived, coated and snow-sprinkled; the sight of her face, which he had not seen for a long time, beside the fire, recalled his home, and he was moved by emotion; he went up to her, gave her his hand, and kissed her upon the brow—she had been the playmate of his child. Constance was equally affected, but shook off the feeling and bustled about seeing to his comfort; and it was like another place with her in it, so much does a face, a presence, lend to the magic which is the enchantment of home.

When they had settled down it seemed like old times: he with his thoughtful considerate courtesy; she with her pensive beautiful regard; he studious, happier for her presence; she with her timid dream silvering and making light the edges of life's clouds, and delighting in her quiet servitude.

One morning amongst the Minister's letters was one from a correspondent too humble to append his name. "*Will Mr. Garland bestow a word or two of encouragement upon one struggling upward, but who is very faint, and who fears sinking upon the way? No money needed.*" It pleased the preacher, and he sent to the address given under initials this response—"*Have faith in God, have faith in self, and fear not.*" It was concise, yet a message; and it was all eloquent. "Mine is a large, rich, but unclarified nature," once said Margaret Fuller; "my history presents much superficial, temporal tragedy. The woman in me kneels and weeps in tender rapture; the man in me rushes forth, but only to be baffled. Yet the time will come when from the union of this tragic king and queen shall be born a radiant sovereign—self." At the commencement of this crusade Garland had set himself the Herculean labour—not of conquering self, but of creating a self of imperishable structure. Under the severe simplicity of Westley Garland's life there was poetry; through all his writings, sub-

servient to stern control, was imagination, but mark, subservient. A thought would here and there flash, on the page or from the pulpit, glowing as the jewel-breast of a bird beneath a song, but it was to link with electric love two worlds. His theology was not that of telling the number of golden square feet paving the Heaven of the righteous, it was, "Heaven is there,—seek it, learn its wonders for yourself, they are not to be told here." Yet no man could have told their fancied glories with more exquisite delight; but such colourings would not be grounded upon implicitness, and therefore, would not do for him, nor others; by his reasoning the same principle applied in the matter of his style. The silver speech of the ancients was noticeably absent from his discourse. The plains of Marathon pale before the Garden of Gethsemane, as the splendour of the Crescent pales before the white banner of the Cross. There was rapture tremulous on the lips of dying children, and this was the modern eloquence more silver to his ears. He possessed a wonderful and sad tenderness, that was like unto an odour that breathes upon us from long years, through old letters, or some relic carefully kept away—maybe a piece of blue ribbon, a little girl's sash, or a baby's sock, which when brought forth in some quiet, sacred moment speaks to the heart through the old odour weighted with long dead kisses and such caresses as shall never come again. Or more happily it may be likened to a hue, which is scarcely a tint, barely a shade, far removed from the strength of colour. Hue; that is the invalid delicacy of colour; a hectic loveliness like the very spirit of colour glowing at a distance; the maidenhood of shadow first shrinking from the light; in nature it will take form in that vivid living pink born of the death of the sun, when the last flushing has fled from the sky. Do you recall that light in your lost child's eyes when they looked up in yours, it was sharp and swift and never to be forgotten, but withal tender beyond the telling: only a hue, strongly defined as it was, one you have been hungrily searching for ever since, in strange eyes, and have never found. Fruit pieces, with the magic name of *Lance* somewhere curving under broken trails of vine, are tender-

hued with that indefinable consummate expression we call, for better name, the bloom.

Allied to this tenderness was refined taste, regulating every action. Taste is the etiquette of delicacy: the nice perception of the most sensitive part of human nature. It is the sensibility of haughtiness toned by gracious forethought. By polite ethics it would be "bad taste" to visit the poor and do all that this minister did, but his was of a different order of taste to that, being allied to tenderness.

It had all come of that creation of Self. Time had been when he was impetuous as the rest of us, was infirm as most; —but he had undergone an ordeal that expunged the inequality. Now Deed was not less in his hand than Thought. Achievement in all that it worked for itself, selfishly, was discarded and sent with Exploit to the limbo of unused effort. In their place he used Action as an agent, ever in subjection.

It was the fashion to quote, to admire, and to eulogize this cultured writer and speaker, but it had a beginning, when he came from out of the crowd, or from out of the pathless solitudes, or from the woods, or the sea, or forth from some huge city; how often is the *earlier* era known? Men discover the teacher or the singer for themselves and leave his novitiate of struggle and agony until long after, when his story is written and his name goes down on the scroll; so here the Unknown spake, men listened, women loved, and the cultured, as quick to discover culture as to detect *mauvais ton*, instinctively became friends with the stranger. His Heronby and Guilmere credentials would have failed of accomplishing this unless allied with that power no credential confers. Really he cared little for the measure of popularity acquired, it was the measure of good he was enabled to do. A home wreck will often produce a living soul, that shall draw souls unto it, and guide such on to safety: this is the solution of the mysterious ends permitting such catastrophe; all grand character has undergone awful and fiery ordeal, and until then it is but forming. Possibly the secret of Garland's success reposed in its tenderness, a quality very absent from modern experience; woman loves this especially, and it was

immediately recognized in the new speaker. Such as the tender Son of God preached, a divinity of delicate care for those essentially needing tenderness; a language of exquisite solicitude, musical with sensitive thoughtfulness; and from the time when He lived one lovely epic, half a dream of tender thought for our earthly well-being, half an ideal of the Heaven he would have us live, there has been but too little imitation of this more gentle quality. Gentleness and charity are akin to tenderness, and share in the ministry of love. This preacher possessed these, and with them a sensitiveness that was peculiar, with nothing of sentiment about it, or shrinking, or straining for sympathy, it was a sensitiveness of tenderness, that a word might wound; of affection, a look might warp; of love, a thought might cause to recoil; of courtesy, a misunderstanding might crush.

It was characteristic and English, that some people who could find no flaw or blemish in his life, no defect or weakness in his books, discerned a certain extravagance in his *titles*—thought them misleading, sometimes far-fetched. Really his titles were secondary, but he never lied under their cover; he held, indeed, that a title, like a face, should be prepossessing, to win favour; it might also, he thought, be graceful, to dwell upon the mind, and linger long on the memory, pleasantly. He considered it a card of introduction, which should be unique and should possess a beautiful concentricity; or a sign indicating the character of the entertainment within, which ought therefore to be in accord with good taste and the etiquette of refinement. He deemed it the sensitive point of consistence between the writer and the public, believing good faith to be as requisite as fine delicacy. Like a Christian name, being most frequently used, it should be harmonious and winsome, for the affection of those often with it. As some hand-post directing the region to be traversed, or the ship's book giving testimony of some prominent fellow-voyager, it decides the prepossessions almost immediately. He further thought that, like titles with men, it should ennoble, be worthy of its inner self, as its inner self should be worthy of it. These were his opinions upon the title question, privately entertained and acted

upon; in spite of which he had been unfortunate enough to hit upon "far fetched" and "extravagant" ones; and it is astonishing how few of us really can rejoice over having thought of everything that will be agreeable to our critics. How men would like each to be a little Providence to direct and ordain the well-being, or the reverse, of his fellows and their affairs! Addison said, "There is no defence against reproach but obscurity; it is a kind of concomitant to greatness, as satires and invectives were an essential part of a Roman triumph." How contradictory; here was a man emerged from obscurity to greatness to escape reproach: this is reversing the order of things, and outraging the essayists entirely; surely the man should learn a sharp lesson from it.

Failing his titles, they quarrelled with his invention: he was too imaginative, should have kept his fancy in a cage, like a tamed rat; and held his poetry down with rasping chains. People of the Wriggle genus pronounced it all foolery, but none the less significant of the ways of Belial; styled him the follower of Baal, and discovered a striking resemblance between him and Balaam. People higher in the intellectual scale thought his style a little florid, and argued upon the "matter-of-fact" premise; they were of opinion that this is not a poetic age, and held that the man with imagination which he dared to foist upon his fellows was a sort of illegitimate poet, with a wallet of contraband picturing without the necessary licence. Others held the imaginative faculty to be a species of ulcer of the mind—man to be avoided accordingly. Others appraised it as clap-trap of the tricksters, to be discountenanced strongly. The man with imagination has more enemies than the man with none. The property of invention is a mark of genius and a sign of power: it exalts its possessor to a position of exclusion, whereby he is safe from the approach of imitative followers: it stamps him by letters patent king of a country his own by discovery; a man may be a poet, a poet may be what is called great without it, but with it he is more—a composer, a creator. As soon forbid the man to think, and lock his poor writing apparatus away, as banish his fancy and control his invention. But if titles, and style,

and imagination found enemies, his Religion found many friends, since it rested upon the basis of yielding much to others and reserving little for himself.

After a day or two the reserve Constance had felt passed away, and she could enter into the domestic duties and the intellectual periods in his company without restraint; with freedom returned confidence; she could talk to him as in the old days, when he had been her adviser in matters of difficulty, the guide in matters of study, and the strong one to whom all her childish perplexities and troubles had been whispered. At that day Lionel had little else to do, save devote himself to making wife and child and this gentle companion of both happy as the birds of spring-time.

One evening, Constance indirectly alluded to Ella; she wished to draw the conversation in the direction of the lady and her child, but scarcely knew how to set about it with sufficient delicacy. He fathomed her wish, and with a voice that trembled slightly, entered upon the topic.

"You have been surprised, Constance, at finding me prominent in the world, and in the possession of wealth and honour, without the dear partner of my life being with me to share it? Allow me to go back in my history to the sad time of our trouble. This you are aware arose out of serious embarrassments. In the earlier years of our married life we entertained much company, and lived beyond limit of the economy demanded by the property left me by my mother. My tastes and pursuits, and a too warm-hearted hospitality straitened my means, and with the endeavour to improve them, in an evil moment I listened to the plausible counsel of one of our visitors, a man who professed much friendship, but whom I afterwards discovered to be in league with a persistent enemy who had resolved, and who really did accomplish my ruin. This false adviser introduced to my consideration certain pretended philanthropic speculations, which were to increase my slender wealth and perpetuate my honour; they enveloped me in debt and covered me with dishonour. At that day I had not the financial knowledge I

have since taken the pains to acquire, and my comparative ignorance, joined to my anxiety to better the position in which I was so unfortunately placed, made me a ready prey. I kept all from my wife, hoping, with the pitiful despair of those whose very life depends upon result, to extricate myself, without causing her the distress of knowing all the full extent of our terrible extremity. Man's supreme province has always seemed to me to be the duty of shielding, of warding off trouble when possible, of keeping big sorrows to himself. The usurers, with whom, alas! one forms acquaintance even before the walls of the University are out of sight, were indefatigable with offers of temporary aid, and as a worse evil I fell into the clutches of these, and a gigantic fraud was perpetrated, by which, caught in the toils, I was brought within power of the arch-enemy of whom I have spoken. Then indeed my difficulties paralyzed me to contemplate. In that hour of thrice-felt horror and humiliation the speculations were brought up, and I was threatened with the additional exposure of common swindling. I was induced to place my affairs in the hands of an infamous attorney, and this misguided policy brought evils to their climax. Through it all I was unable to communicate with my father, owing to our unfortunate misunderstanding and the unrelenting nature of his feeling towards me in consequence.

"Ella learnt that I was ruined, others might add dishonoured. I could not, could not meet her sad questioning eyes, and fled as one accursed, although, God knows, my crime had been a light one. The coming ruin, and that looming ignominy which my enemy did not scruple to bring to my very door, filled my soul with a blackness of dread and sensitive anguish that must have unsettled my reason. Worn-out by prolonged anxiety and suffering, unable to continue with my darlings so soon to be homeless, I at evening time quitted the dear old home, to return to it no more. I felt that once the cause of the enmity between us was removed, my father would forgive Ella and receive her with our child; the hovering disgrace would still further lessen his opinion of myself, but he might forgive her. Thus confronted by the horrible ordeal of the criminal courts if I remained, there was before me the alterna-

tive of flight or death; the former was more repulsive than the latter, for I was truly sick unto death of my life. Lost to surroundings in that morbid, brooding dejection, I took the lonely path leading from our garden to the sea, to find myself face to face with my enemy, prowling thereabout in expectation doubtless of my being driven to some such desperate course. With him was a man as fiendlike and more brutal; I would have avoided them, but they impeded my retreat, and by nameless insult goaded me to expression of my anger. I cannot tell what I said, or did, for between that dreadful time and now a merciful blank is interposed. I can recall the happiness of oblivion, the ecstasy of the total loss of remembrance. When consciousness returned it was to find myself the object of a ministering tenderness, so pure and holy it was as though I had been rescued from death and darkness by an instrument of Heaven itself. It was Lady Guilmere, of whom until then I knew but little, and was far from suspecting all the sublime depth of character; her ladyship nursed me through stages not of bodily weakness only, but of mental crises also; she awakened hope, having saved life, revived interest, vital interest, in it, and filled my soul with a purpose. She had learnt much in my delirium, and I told her all. I heard that the world supposed me dead. 'Now is the time,' said my friend, 'to commence life anew; with your talents and attainments under another name you may clear the honour of the old. Reveal your purpose to no one, not even to your wife at present; but enter boldly upon some public arena, and should your identity be discovered by any who have known you, take them into your confidence, or I will for you. A great future is open, avail yourself of it, trust in God, have faith in Him, have faith in self, and fear not.'

"It was a project of such daring there is no wonder if on the sick-bed I viewed it with doubt and hesitation, but as I recovered strength the old love of mine for the ministry was fanned into flame, a flame that will no more be extinguished this side the grave. I grew better quickly, the design, as she believed it would, fed my restoration to health.

"I intended only keeping the truth from Ella for a brief

season while I was entering heart and soul into the work and preparing for our future. Of Lady Guilmere's sympathy, encouragement, and help, it is useless to attempt to speak, no description would exhaust it, nor do it justice. You know I am not impetuous; do nothing without well weighing consequences, and applying all the forethought possible; after mature deliberation and solemn conviction I accepted with new life, conferred after passing half way through the shadowy valley, a new name, designing with this to restore the honour and fairness of the old, not only in the sight of my fellows, but also in that of my family, with whom I made the resolution not to communicate until I could do so without shame and suffering. I relied upon my father, (when the cause of his grave anger should be no more), repenting of his sternness, and taking Ella and our little one to live with him at the Park. Alas for the fortitude of the heart when it has to struggle with the affections, I found my task beyond my strength; my whole soul went yearningly forth towards the dear ones. It would imperil the whole scheme, probably, and render my labour of non-avail, but it was more almost than I could bear, to be separated from them. Prudence whispered, "It is but for a little while; be firm, be patient; consecrate the present to the good work you are rescued from darkness to perform, and which shall lead you to the light fairer for the intermediate exercise of denial and devotion!' But my heart murmured, 'It is my wife, my child!' Then answered the new advocate, speaking for my duty and my honour, 'The service you are engaged upon is greater than any earthly tie!' and the passage in the Gospel would come vividly to mind, 'And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.' 'But,' I said, 'I have not done this; my sacrifice is of earthly and interested nature.' 'The grosser sacrifice,' replied the voice, 'is merged in the loftier priesthood, with abnegation of the old and creation of a new self.' Then, I said, I was a fugitive from suffering when called, at war with my own existence,

and outraging my merciful Creator. 'So was Saul,' said the voice, 'a greater than thou in all bad deed and in all good work.' Then I put forward the secular work for the increase of money, and I received this reply, 'It is means to an end, and the end is good.' I left the argument, dedicated every energy to my ministry in the highest sense possible, endeavoured to work good in conjunction with unselfish care for all, and, with the active business of an honest man, applied myself by every effort to increasing my store of treasury, wherewith to discharge the claim that wrecked our happy home. Man has sharp lessons to learn during life, but none more so than conquering the world, crucifying the flesh, and fighting the devil. Yet I am sorry to tell you, after it all, the chance resemblance to mine of some little one in my congregation, leaves me weaker than any woman. So much for human nature; clearly the strength is unequal to that needed by the will; were my darlings—for the present lost to me—only recovered, I fear my plans would crumble, every one of them, and I should waive all in my yearning to have them with me."

"I should think so," was the simple rejoinder; so softly uttered, yet so full of thought for the absent. There was a pause; then Constance said,—

"I cannot see it right at all; the woman is the helpmate, and her place is by her husband's side, if under a hundred names. Ella would not have refused to share this public exile, and, if necessary, for a time this change of name; and I cannot see how her presence would have jeopardized new prospects."

"No," said the Minister thoughtfully; "but you are looking at it from one side, and I from the other. I suffered more than you or any one could understand those last days at Torquay: to one of my nature it is *all* to stand in the presence of the loved without a reflection upon one's honour, and it was for this I designed to wait. Too late I learnt that, through Ella's or my father's fault, the reconciliation I depended upon had not taken place, and that they had quitted the spot, no one knew whither, but not in poverty. I paid a flying visit

to the old home, leaving money with my child. I hope the enemy who hath wrought this evil thing may never suffer the pangs I experienced that night of my visit to the despoiled home. It would pain your gentle soul were I to describe to you the scene."

"Yes. I called before it happened, and once afterwards, but Ella would not see me."

"Poor thing! Poor thing! I understand it would be impossible."

"I think, for all you have said, it has been a hazardous experiment, which by a very narrow line is divided from being a cruel one: you were greatly loved!"

What emotion was underlying her words, and how the love she herself felt came out upon the utterance!

"And to think I was so little worthy! Why, even our Constance, who loved me then, has turned colder to me now!"

She flushed, not daring to lift her eyes, but she was very honest and ingenuous, and replied with an exquisite sincerity, "You mistake, I love you very dearly, shall love you all my life, more than anybody in the world!" It terminated passionately, with an outburst of tears. He was greatly moved; there was such depth of devotion, such a world of long-treasured sacred idealism. It was grateful to him, fragrant as incense of lilies, it could not be otherwise loving her; but it was embarrassing and delicate, that no semblance of advantage should be taken, no shadow of encouragement be given, yet that this young fresh love should not be wounded, or even blown upon by a breath too cold and coarse in his opinion to come in contact, so rarely did he think of it. Imperceptibly he had become placed in a sensitive position when a movement either way seemed fraught with peril and outlined by pain. Eloquent as the words were, she had not thought to reveal her secret, but it was borne upon them as thistle-down is borne on summer air, and floated towards him lightly, beautifully, and unmistakably: how to act, in this emergency of vibrating chords?

"It is kind of you to say so, and your words find responsive echo in my heart, with the tender caring love of some watch-

ful brother whose affection could not be at once more pure, more binding. You will ever think of me, look on me, as one who gives you a heart's choicest and most affectionate sympathy. I will cherish the remembrance of this as one of the sacred experiences preserved in the hallowed recesses of my heart."

"And you will love me a little?"

"Always, Constance, as I would a sister, or some friend whose leaning upon me rendered the love sacred."

"Such love is worthless, a mere acquaintance may claim that; yours should be different, for it represents all in the world worth living for, and I can't help saying so."

His pale cheek tinted a deepening glow while he replied,—

"What can I say to you, how act, dear Constance? The treasure of your love is deeply welcome to me, and lightens up the weariness of life with more grateful pleasure than I can describe to you. I am all unworthy of it, and unable beyond the limits I have explained to return it, yet all that is mine to give is yours, and on those conditions I accept this young and beautiful affection, so pure and devoted. Do not fear, I will never divulge this sacred pledge, nor hold it valueless; so long as it is a joy to you this house shall be your home, I, all that you would wish. Ever alone, yet never alone, you may live upon earth a life consecrated to that ideal goodness, dim in every heart of girlhood, yet which few possess the courage to confirm as you have done. Ever lean upon me, I will never fail with my support."

Thus with gentle tact he placed that ideal goodness in advance of himself; then their talk wandered back to Ella; the haunting influence seemed to affect his every thought.

Constance resumed her work, happier; he was a confidant now, and that promise of his was sweet. She recovered her cheerfulness, and her eyes were often lifted all alight with gratitude and pleasure.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EVER ALONE, YET NEVER ALONE.

"To-day."

A letter addressed '*Mrs. Esther Thompson, care of Sir Horace Vivian,*' had filled that lady with vague, unaccountable misgivings. A woman's handwriting, and signed '*An Unknown Friend.*' She was to meet the writer if she would hear something of importance concerning the dead. The message was mysterious, unsettling; sufficient to send a flash of agony to heart and brain, but not sufficient to acquaint her with one particular, only that she was to meet the writer: "to-day." The appointment was to be held at a house in Gray's Inn Road, and the writer requested that strict confidence might be observed.

To decline going was impossible; worked up to a feverish pitch, utterly perplexed, wondering, distressed, the old wound reopened, the great sorrow renewed, Mrs. Travers could but kiss her child with emotion, say she was only going a little way and would soon return, and hurry on. Ella was surprised by her mother's curious conduct and wished to accompany her, but this she would not permit.

Dull and lonely, the child sat in their room awaiting her mother's return. Lady Vivian and her daughters had accompanied Sir Horace upon his morning drive, so the house seemed very still and dull. Presently a maid came to her, saying a person at the back entrance wished to speak with her.

Trembling, the child hastened to the court, where a respectable-looking woman held a letter; it was in the handwriting of her mother, and the child started with apprehension :—

Come to me at once, darling. I have sent the servant to bring you here.

"I will run and put on my hat and jacket!"

"You will not be long, if you please, miss." Ella hastened away and returned almost immediately. The two set forth.

* * * * *

When Mrs. Travers arrived at the house of meeting, she was ushered into a shabby-genteel parlour, where an elaborately dressed female with a profusion of blonde hair received her politely, begging she would be seated, and closing the door with excess of care. This person, in whom the reader recognizes Mrs. Bartholomew Rolf, opened her business in what she was pleased to think was a business-like manner.

"When two women, madam, unacquainted with each other, meet upon a delicate subject, of vital interest to one of them, it is preferable to dispense with formality and speak to one another frankly, as two women may when confronted by calamity or discovery."

Mrs. Travers could only bow, astonished at this ominous preamble, her heart beating, and breathing with difficulty; she experienced the suffocating feeling so dangerous, but which happily does not visit one often.

"I must ask you to summon all your fortitude to your aid, and to suppress the natural weakness of our sex, which leads us to become hysterical when apprized of that which shocks!"

"I promise to preserve my self-control, madam! I have been well disciplined in trouble, believe me!" What blasting revelation touching poor Lionel's character and honour was forthcoming?

"As you may have gathered from my brief note, I am about to communicate something you should have known before; it concerns Mr. Lionel Travers!"

"I judged so. You will pardon me, I am suffering terrible suspense: do not prolong it unnecessarily."

"I am sorry to say I am compelled to do so, until we can send for your little girl; the child's presence is requisite."

"This is very strange," said Mrs. Travers, much surprised, "she wished to come with me, but I would not allow it. I

shall prefer my child not hearing any reflection upon her dead father's honour."

"It is entirely in your own hands, madam, whether you hear it yourself. My time is much occupied, and I have none to waste; at some personal inconvenience I was about to do you a service; at least most women would take it in that light; but I am not in the least particular about it, our interview can close, or you can write a line to your little girl: my servant will take it and bring the child at once."

The blonde arose impatiently, so as to intimate that she meant no nonsense; standing, either to open the door, or ring the bell. Writing materials were upon the table, and Mrs. Travers wrote that note. Of course, this was a *ruse* to obtain possession of the child, who being secured elsewhere in the hands of Bartholomew, he sent the servant to her mistress, to say that the young lady would rather not come with a stranger.

"I will go for her, I shall not be long!" said Mrs. Travers, rising.

"Yes, but then we shall lose time; it is dreadfully provoking; perhaps, after all, I had better go on with it."

Again with excess of care she went to the door to see it was tightly fast and returned to her seat. Mrs. Travers' feelings all this time may be imagined.

"I shall be sorry," commenced the blonde, "to pain you but cannot altogether avoid it; mine is an embarrassing duty, but I must execute it to the best of my poor ability. I am not a refined person, ma'am, was never educated in the delicate office of breaking news, good or bad, therefore, if I'm blunt impute it to my ignorance. I will ask you first to think of all the bad ones you have ever heard of, with all the deceptions and impostures possible to recall, and it will in some way prepare you for the extraordinary piece of intelligence you are about to hear."

To describe the effect of this preliminary coarseness upon that sensitive lady would be out of the question, she was as one petrified. It seemed sacrilege; to listen to it, a heinous outrage. That such a preface should introduce aught of her

dead hero, that idolized husband, whom she thought of as with the angels that should have been his earthly company, seemed such shocking desecration, that she was as one stricken by some sudden blow of so unusual a kind it could scarcely be realized. Her soul recoiled at the despoiling atmosphere and she was completely prostrate.

"To some extent what I am about to say will appear incredible, fortunately I am prepared with testimony. When living at Eagle Hall for the last few years you were often visited by Miss Evelyn, a clergyman's daughter?"

"Miss Evelyn was my attached friend. I knew her from the time when she was quite a child."

"It was a dangerous acquaintance for your husband, who came to love this girl."

"My husband always loved her!" replied Mrs. Travers with composure, but speaking faintly; "Constance Evelyn was as one of our family."

"Your husband loved her with a guilty love—"

"That is untrue, most wickedly untrue!" cried the victim, writhing under this fiendish torture. Without heeding the interruption Mrs. Rolf proceeded.

"And when, deprived of means, he could no longer provide for her, as even you know he had been wont to do—'

"My husband supplied the cost of her education, madam, about which I was first consulted."

The other plodded sturdily on with her narrative, regardless of the explanation, "He conceived a project of extravagant daring, and was successful in carrying it out; it was to counterfeit a suicide's death, begin life afresh under another name, which, assisted by influential accomplices, and making use of his cleverness and talent, was for him a matter of comparative ease; then, with money, and released from yourself and your child, he was at liberty to take any licence; he took it, sent for the girl, and is living with her now, in the most strict retirement."

Oh no, she was not to faint under this! Would such relief could have been! With veins like knotted cords, and fiery currents making her feel how life may know sharp anguish when to

faint would be to rest; she was exquisitely alive to the instant torture of that moment.

It took a little while to comprehend the extreme meaning. There were two most wonderful revelations; to be told that Lionel lived was so amazing and sudden a disclosure as almost to benumb the faculties and prevent consciousness of that other most wretched charge, but as that, too, dawned upon her mind, and with it the thought that an unusually bad man *might* perform under exceptional circumstances what had been attributed to him, she sickened before the whole, but only one instant; then she rose from her seat and calmly thanked the woman for her unsolicited information.

"What you have told me, madam, has not made me much happier; if you are deceiving me I doubt if forgiveness will be extended for so dark a sin, if not, and you be instead deceived, think for an instant of my suffering now, who loved him with a tenderness surpassing that common in the world. You did not know him, or, even in error, or even purposely, you would not trifle with his name or with his memory. But all you have uttered is so improbable that its falseness is borne upon the face of it. I put it to you, does it sound reasonable, madam? Admitting all of it, I know his love for me and for our child was such, that he *could not*, if for that alone, act as you say."

"Well, it's very soon settled and proved, and without great inconvenience to yourself: a journey will do it, of fifty miles by rail, and some half dozen by hired vehicle, and I will show you the man himself, and the girl; not, mark you, in any uncertain, accidental company, but alone together, by their own fireside, and comfortable enough I bet a crown, while the good wife's out at service!"

The lady's eyes flashed angrily, this was no small threat, its tremendous yet vulgar sarcasm might have goaded a saint, it literally seemed to turn the whole current of this lady's being. Trembling from head to foot with agitation, and scarcely able to address the other with common civility, she contrived to say, "If that is to be seen, I most certainly ought to see it. I will go with you: let us not lose one minute! I am

dressed and ready to depart, now, now; or will you unsay the dreadful words, tell me you have deceived me, that you are in error, that my hearing is failing me, that one of us is mad."

"No, thank you, I would rather not; you must have patience; one can't start on a journey like this as though merely going to the Strand; another thing, you surely don't suppose I am doing you this friendly service for the love of you, whom I don't care the snap of a finger for! A variety of people have their price and I have mine, and I'm the last person in the world to work for nothing. Jewellery's cheap enough, but dress and fashion's expensive, and must be kept up, together with an establishment, to say nothing of supporting a carriage, for one can't go trailing skirts through London mud when it's possible to ride. I must know first what you'll consider my reward."

This was candour with a vengeance, the very brutality of business. Poor soul, she had little to give, only the few miserable pounds she had scraped together to assist in clearing the debts of loved, lost Lionel. But she was told he lived, had wealth; she would not need them then, and she laughed bitterly. In her heart, however, she did not credit the woman's word; some common adventuress living by her wits, who had discovered her sorrow and would make market of her grief; but those savings were too hardly got together to be parted with so easily; she just said,—

"I will go with you, and return with you; *if* what you say be true, the little in my possession shall be yours."

"Well, I suppose I must content with that. You've enough for our return first-class fares?"

"I don't know how much it is; I have a couple of pounds in my purse."

"We shall manage, I dare say; I'll go and put my things on!"

She went and put her things on, and was a long time about it; then came down and invited the lady to have some bottled beer, which being declined, the energetic Mrs. Rolf quaffed the contents of the bottle herself. In the passage she

took affectionate farewell of a showily-dressed girl, of some fourteen years, whom, next to extensive display in the matter of apparel, she was more fond of than anything else in the world. A very pretty, very bold and self-confident, very superficial, very noticeable, very forward, yet when she liked very pleasing girl; and, after making allowance for her miserable, frivolous, and sinful bringing up, in no sense so bad as might have been expected, either in morals or manners. One of the problems of the great city is, how a child, reared from the first in an atmosphere of depravity, surrounded by every abominable influence, with her natural protectors, who ought to be an example, setting a pattern of odious type, as is often seen, how such an one acquires or preserves a particle of good. This young person was known as Edith Lessie, her mother, before the Bartholomew Rolf era, having been familiarly known upon the turf as the wife of James Hart Lessie, the notorious betting-man, who committed suicide after a fearful run of ill-luck. His lady (who, by the way, did not wait for this, but decamped with characteristic foresight immediately the fortune began to turn) transferred her affections with her millinery bills, and threw the child in, to Bartholomew Rolf, who became the possessor of the lot. It proved a very bad lot, but in this they were well mated. Mr. Lessie had been a mere ordinary black-leg; Mr. Rolf was an accomplished scoundrel in the very zenith of his villainy; and Mrs. Lessie, who admired this sort of thing, held her present owner in becoming respect.

In this rank garden flourished the poor flower which, with other cultivation, would have been one of singular grace; yet all the beauty and freshness remained, and the child was growing with many a seed of good hidden away from sight, notwithstanding that she feared Bartholomew and despised her mother.

Mrs. Rolf led the way to an adjoining cab-rank, and selected a yellow Hansom, in which they were driven to London Bridge, the lady leaning back with a handkerchief to her face, and exchanging no word with her unsympathetic companion. At the terminus, Mrs. Rolf, without

ceremony, purchased a traveller's bottle of brandy, and thus provided for the journey, seated herself with an air of comfort. The quivering, shaken mortal beside her, faint with agony of mind and horrible suspense, feeling half unable to enter upon that hour or more of waiting. It seemed a long and terrible journey, made doubly long by the uncertainty attending its issue. Mind upon the rack the whole way, eyes never daring to lift to the kind gaze of strangers, who saw this was no common trouble, and would have interchanged some word of interest and pity. A wearying time, all linked from beginning to end with stifling pangs, leaving her weak and smitten upon arrival.

The guide hired a vehicle, asking the driver his fare to some place the name of which the lady failed to hear, and they were driven down a street known as Trafalgar Street, which is one of the main thoroughfares to and from the station, and communicates with the northern division of the town. Past an elegant church, one of Sir Charles Barry's graceful poems in stone; past a wide space planted round with a double avenue of trees; they reached higher ground, where a line of elms bordered a pathway, and in summer time yielded pleasant shade to the row of houses built upward on the high and healthy site; at the end of this was a noble building, for extent, situation, and architecture, having no equal in the kingdom. The woman with blonde hair, on putting her head out of the carriage-window and asking what the building was, learnt this to be the workhouse, whereat she withdrew suddenly. In a few minutes they were upon a white road, traversing the height of downland, a superb extent of scenery outspread on either hand: one had no soul for this, the other no heart, and the verdant panorama was unrolled for nothing; still the keen fresh air revived the lady, and the clearer blue, the fairer light, even of brilliant transparency in the afternoon, seemed to speak to her troubled spirit and to say, "Be not mocked, however gloomy thy life, a clear beyond awaits thee, there are heights as well as depths; Heaven is bright as ever it was, it is only the fleeting clouds prevent its being seen."

It seemed a long drive, the way by road was circuitous, but they reached the village between five and six o'clock, putting up at the Grange Inn, the landlady thereof herself going to the door to receive her distinguished guests. In her opinion the showy lady was evidently the mistress and the other the maid, and the blonde, in consequence, met with obsequious attention, pleasing her much. The lady was thus enabled to escape to their chamber, where once alone she burst into a flood of passionate tears and experienced their saving relief. The dressy lady downstairs explained they were not going to stay all night; but would require tea, after which they were going to make a call; and, upon their return, would want some brandy-and-water and biscuits, and the horse to be put in immediately for their journey back, all of which Mrs. Payne engaged to have done.

It was evident to Mrs. Payne, that the Grange Inn was rising in popularity, was becoming known, would go down to posterity in Guide Books and Bradshaw, as one of the famous hostelries of the world; and Mrs. Payne resolved to spare no effort towards maintaining this better order of things. "After all, why not," murmured the good woman, "people run to see far less pretty and less interesting places; the Bishop's House alone is a picture, and as for the Grange, well,"—but after mentioning the Grange, the relict of the worthy Jabez stopped, as people generally did. She bustled about preparing the tea, and a highly creditable meal was presented, what with home-made bread, fresh butter, new milk, eggs from the poultry-yard at the rear, ham of her own curing, and cakes of her own baking; together with tea and coffee of the best; and when the becomingly-attired waitress went up stairs to the second traveller, and informed her of tea being ready, it was a great disappointment to Mrs. Payne to be requested to send a cup of tea upstairs; however, the dressy lady made up for it, and satisfied Mrs. Payne to the utmost by the justice done to her viands.

The presence of this elaborately-costumed lady would have caused commotion in the village had she appeared, but it suited her tactics to remain perfectly private until some time

after dusk had fallen, then to set forth in company with her unhappy travelling companion, to whom it was the torture of being led to execution. And up to the last moment, Mrs. Travers was indignantly opposed to believing the woman's account, although staggered by the persistent, deep-seated purpose at the bottom of it.

The shadowy old Grange, standing back amongst its trees, and the black water with that hideous boat, chilled the lady with a premonitory sense of the horrible. Mrs. Rolf lost no time indulging in such feelings, or noticing those of her companion, her main object being to preserve the finery which was so important an element of herself; she endeavoured to secure this by gathering up the extensively frilled silk, stepping boldly into the boat, and sitting upon her under-skirts. The lady was left to seat herself as best she could, and very much in the damp.

Mrs. Bartholomew Rolf possessed the muscle of a prize-fighter or a Westmoreland wrestler, and sent off their lumbering craft with the expedition of a coal barge in its best and most sportive mood. When the door to the cellar passage was reached, and unlocked with the key in her possession, the blonde impressively begged her companion to keep close and utter no sound, whatever she might see or hear; and to retire with her immediately, when satisfied, or feeling her strength unequal to remaining longer. The lady having faintly promised this, they went on. The door admitting to the cellar was unfastened, had been so left by Noel Barnard, and this dark area crossed, the back-kitchen was reached, and here Mrs. Rolf experienced the first uneasiness, for she had been instructed by her employer to remain there should the servants be in the other kitchen, until they quitted it for their domestic duties. The servants were not in the kitchen, being occupied upstairs; and a fire was burning in the grate. The woman led the way past into a passage branching from a spacious hall, and crossed this cautiously, opening a door with stealthy absence of sound. It was covered with a thick curtain, falling from above to the carpet. Suddenly she felt her companion cling to her as though for support. The lady heard her husband's voice!

It was a large oak-panelled room, with a long half-unfolded screen, similar to those at one time general in country-houses, drawn across at a few feet from the door.

The occupants of the room were talking, at the far end, and the woman raised the curtain a little, then lightly stepped forward beckoning her victim to the screen, through the divisions of which they could obtain a view of all that was passing. There were waxen lights and a large and cheerful fire, so that there was no difficulty in seeing; it was all too clear, and the lady felt as if her very life was passing from her during that supreme agony. For *he* was there, with his majestic face, paler, more thoughtful, and aged, but thrilling her as she gazed upon him, and stilling her heart's beating with the suddenness; and yet she had been prepared! But he was different somehow, sad, and more tender, and the voice sounded different: always musical it was now a broken cadence of deep feeling, exquisite emotion, and it shook her mightily; and but for the words, and that other sitting by him, her needle-work laid down, and tearful; but for that the wife no longer widow, the wife stirred to a new strong interest in life and the living, must have rushed to his side and fallen upon her knees before him while sobbing forth her joy, but that other stayed this, checked the torrent of overwhelming glad and sad surprise, and arrested her with outraged dread.

"What can I say to you, how act, dear Constance? The treasure of your love is deeply welcome to me, and lightens up the weariness of life with more grateful pleasure than I can describe to you. I am all unworthy of it, and unable beyond the limits I have explained to return it, yet all that is mine to give is yours, and on those conditions I accept this young and beautiful affection, so pure and devoted. Do not fear, I will never divulge this sacred pledge, nor hold it valueless; so long as it is a joy to you this house shall be your home, I, all that you would wish. Ever alone, yet never alone, you may live upon earth a life consecrated to that ideal goodness, dim in every heart of girlhood, yet which few possess the courage to confirm as you have done. Ever lean upon me, I will never fail with my support."

"It was all too clear, and the lady felt as if her very life was passing from her during that supreme agony."—Page 344.

These were the words uttered by the man sitting before that Grange fireside, overheard by the wife, whom even as he spoke he had first in mind and heart all the time ; but they sounded to her a very damning knell of perfidy and woe, and so amazing that had not her own ears heard, she never could or would have duly credited their meaning. "Ever alone, yet never alone," the words seemed to ring and symbolize the future of herself. She feebly intimated to the impassive woman who had disclosed this dark chapter, that she was willing to depart, and they withdrew as they had entered, silently and unseen.

How she contrived to seat herself in the boat, or walk the silent village street, she never knew; for she was as one dreaming, and but for being led would have stood, or sunk, wondering and powerless.

This thing was all so strange, common troubles and griefs fled from its side as having no kin. She had borne her widowhood, sharp and poignant though it had been, and yet having no friend nor comforter to soothe by so much as a word, save her thoughtful child. And that false friend had come to gloat upon the misery causeless. How glad she felt now, that she had refused the false support this Constance Evelyn had offered when she called upon her in her hour of sore trial. Other women had trials, nay, she had heard of other women's husbands neglecting and deserting them, but this was not like such ordinary baseness, it had no precedent, and its marvellous surrounding of daring cast a mystery over it, which utterly dumbfounded her. Why had he not left the country with this youthful sharer of his guilt, as others did? But no, he was living upon the same sea-board, at a slender journey's distance, open and bare to public scrutiny, his only concealment the change of name; the more these thoughts flashed and crowded upon her, the more enveloped in startling and inscrutable mystery it became. But human nature, bearing much, will not endure beyond a given point, and this delicate lady's strength gave way suddenly in the village street. It was some distance from the inn, and by the garden railing of a pretty cottage, where the blinds were

drawn, and within which a piano was being softly played, while a lady's voice sang some sacred melody. Mrs. Rolf, deducing quickly that people who play and sing sacred melodies on a weekday evening are sure to be of Samaritan tendencies, proceeded to the door and knocked; and when a little serving-maid came to the summons, explained that a lady had become faint, would she ask her mistress if she might be brought in until recovered? The music ceased, a pleasant lady dressed in mourning came into the passage accompanied by a youth, whom from the resemblance of refined features and gentle manners it was easy to see was her son; and when they heard the request, they went into the garden and helped to raise and bear the stranger to the house, where she was placed upon a sofa and treated with considerate tenderness.

"I'm glad I didn't have this bother in Brighton or London!" was Mrs. Bartholomew's thought with characteristic want of feeling, champing and fuming impatiently to be off, and fearing she would lose the return train to town. "Are you better, dear?" she murmured in her victim's ear, opining it would be more consistent to use an affectionate term or two. The sufferer neither heard nor understood, was motionless as the dead, but not free from pain, as the poor face proved; and the kind lady of the house understanding it all too well, leaned over her with deep pity, and told the red-faced golden-haired person that she must not be removed that night.

"But my goodness me!" cried Mrs. Rolf in dire alarm, "the woman owes me a lot of money, which I might never see the light of,—apart from which, it's of no interest to me whether she goes or stops!"

Mrs. Evans had looked closely at the two, and feared all was not as it should be.

"Well, you cannot press your claim while the lady lies in this state, her recovery is of the first importance, and after that your business, whatever it is."

"That's your opinion, but it isn't mine! I hold people should pay their debts and take their pleasure afterwards, with what's left. I've given up the greater part of this blessed day to her and likely seems my reward! Next time I do a person

a service I'll take care to see the money first. But since she's so well off here and likely to be a worry to me, I'll go on without her; only let my lady get over this little bit and if I know her address, and it aint likely to be out of *our* Directory, I'll be down on her like a door nail, sharp!" With which eccentric vituperation Mrs. Rolf flung herself out of the cottage and marched down the street to the inn, at the rear of which she stirred up her man and was quickly upon the road to Brighton.

"Bertie darling," said Mrs. Evans, much shocked at the violence and selfishness of the person, and much relieved by her departure, "there has been some terrible wrong done here, I am convinced of it. This is a lady, of gentle usage, and even now suffering from some recent trial. Every care shall be taken of her! Poor thing, do you notice she wears mourning?" She sat down beside her, the white hands clasped to convey some of the speaker's warmth: the boy standing close, solicitous and grave.

Presently her eyes opened, "Where is she, that dreadful woman?"

Mrs. Evans looked meaningly at her son, while replying tenderly,—

"You are with friends, and alone." It seemed to stir some painful memory, for the invalid repeated "Ever alone, yet never alone!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BERTIE EVANS STORMS THE CITADEL.

Hawkingdean heard, and with regret, that the Master of the Bishop's House lay ill; with all his peculiarity and gruffness, Geoffrey Hamilton was well-beloved, and the awe which the downs-men and their goodwives felt, blended with this grateful affection, did not spoil the general sorrow when it was known that he lay sick, and had neither doctor nor nurse other than his devoted little daughter. The recluse held both these in sovereign contempt, and if he had desired either, they were not to be obtained nearer than Brighton.

"Just what I feared," said the old pastor, walking thoughtfully home from his daily visit; "I told him he wanted a change of scene and rest for the mind, and now it may take an unfavourable turn, and prove a really serious illness, instead of the slight indisposition he prefers to consider it. Not but that I would readily accept a far worse one than this for the delight of being nursed by so tender and thoughtful a child." The latching of his garden-gate did not shut out the thought of his little sweetheart, whose exquisite ministry of considerate delicacy dwelt with too welcome an intensity to be forgotten when he sat alone in the midst of books, with a portrait over the mantel of the wife who had died and left no child to occupy her place. It was a thin, hard face in the frame; it might have been the painter's fault, but the eyes lacked love and gentleness, and the compressed lips betokened peevishness, or pain, or disappointment, or what not that compresses lips.

And Violet knew that she was thought thus kindly of

by her old friend and playmate. Perhaps it cheered some lonely hours in dusky rooms, and by the bedside when, as evening drew on, the dark shading of the chamber sent sometimes a chill to her heart in spite of all its warmth. Those were trying seasons for the sweet girl-child, whose love of light and life and music was an inborn passion, but she never repined, patiently watching by him. She was tearful when he could not see it, because he was so pale and worn-looking; she noticed it more now that he was confined to a sick-chamber.

"And how can the man expect to get better if he won't have in a doctor or consult medical authority?"

Thus the pastor asked of himself. He was in error. Mr. Hamilton had consulted medical authority, had sat up in bed propped by pillows, with the quilt strewn and chairs piled with the most curious old medical works ever collected together; he would medicate for himself, if he needed it, which he very much doubted, but, man-like, he felt a degree alarmed now he was down. So old Pharmacy came down off the shelves—and Geoffrey Hamilton's Pharmacology embraced periods from Paracelsus downwards—and up from the chests, of which the Bishop's House boasted many: its cellars and garrets catacombing the dead science and quackery of the world; and out of recesses where lofty cupboards with oak doors concealed vast tiers of ancient tomes bound in the imperishable pig-skin of the good old school of binding, when men's thought was preserved as though, indeed, to last for ever. He set himself to go through these, hunting out what was the matter with him, turning faint very often over the task, and decidedly more alarmed than before he commenced; mumbling and grumbling over Linacre, Harvey, and Sydenham, searching deep the treatises of Malpighi, and in alarm tossing from him a bulky Boerhaave, then going irritably into the Hunters, from which he emerged shivering, and fancying his complaints multiplied a hundredfold. Mead and Laennec were searchingly examined, and, with assumed energy, as though to warn the old physicians against coming any of their barber tricks with him, strong and well, and opposed to

nonsense, especially professional nonsense. He had picked them up very cheap long ago, and had never shown them particular reverence. They might resent it, now he was, so to say, at a disadvantage, and he just frowned surlily upon them, as intimating his ability to do without them, and the resistful attitude he was taking, midst which he tumbled on one side, faint, upsetting his pillows, and dropping his books; bringing Miss Hamilton to the bed, fluttering finely and tremulous, and she gave him some brandy, when he sat up again and tried to have a tussle with iron Abernethy, whose ferociousness settled him, and he did no more for that day. He did not gather much after all, except that he was very bad, which he more than suspected before, and he felt proportionately disgusted, not with himself, but with the doctors.

Like many another his patience did not improve with confinement; he was disposed to be moody, irritable, and gloomy, and any one but his untiring little girl would have thought him very trying; perhaps she did at one time, but now he often rewarded her with a fond smile; she knew they were there before, though they did not often show themselves, and this made all the difference. Still it was dull work for her, and, when he was lost in abstraction she felt terribly alone. His muttering, when in company with the ancients, did not improve it, for what did she know of Celsus, of Aëtius, or of Paulus Ægineta? Her little world was all her little day circumscribed by the verdant hollow between the hills, the small village was content not to trouble with what lay beyond.

Calling at the cottage one afternoon, the pastor told Mrs. Evans of his friend's illness, and incidentally alluded to Violet's attentive care. Illness, which breaks down so many barriers, broke down that of Mrs. Evans's reserve, and she said she would venture to call and see if she could be of any use, and offer to bear the child company. Both Bertie and the pastor were surprised; but the boy, who knew how self-denying she was, and how often she had tended others at the cost of rest and health, made no remark, but simply looked with the admiring love ever animating his countenance when

his mother was the subject of contemplation. The pastor, however, gently remarked, "I am afraid our friend would raise some objection; he is very singular, you know, in some things."

"I shall not disturb him," said the widow quietly; "the little girl needs a motherly friend to converse with just now. I hope not to intrude so far as to cause annoyance."

The lady called, to Violet's joy; it cheered the child; she felt a different being. There was no companionship in their servants, and she literally had no friend to whom to confide her troubles or anxieties; so these became knit, and their affection one for another grew with rare delicacy and sensitiveness.

Violet told her Papa of it, and his brow clouded at first, but afterwards, finding the lady had no desire to trespass, and was diffident, actuated alone by the most respectful sympathy, he turned all the other way, wished to see her, and did so, thanking her for the kind attention, and, when they were alone, talked with anxious solicitude of the future of his little girl, should anything befall himself. "Of course it won't, I know very well," he said; "but when one becomes imbued with the horrible theories of the doctors, one never knows what to expect, and I've been reading some of their articles lately as a congenial pursuit." His grim smile, illustrating the cynicism, was anything but pleasant. This sensible woman, however, could detect that the surface of ice covered a depth of abundant riches: she did not utter an eloquent dirge before he was dead, nor musically toll a knell for his departure, but, cheerfully taking his thin bony hand, held it with that inspiring warmth which puts life into one, while she said, "You will be restored to health shortly, and need not be borne down by any anxiety of the kind. I will always be the friend of your daughter, if you permit it: I am humbly circumstanced, as you know, but sincere, and, in my opinion, sincerity compensates for many qualities one may not possess. I have not found many people either genuine or sincere in my short contact with the world." This remark pleased the scholar; he set a seal on it therewith, which bore this impression—"Hollow!"

Life at the Bishop's House became brighter and happier

after the first visits of their neighbour; Violet improved visibly under the impetus of the friendship: it also communicated additional softness to her naturally pleasing manner, as the companionship of a refined gentlewoman will, and the Master felt this innovation to be of service.

Once he alluded to the lady's son, when she instantly replied, "He is very well, engaged as usual with his books, and giving all his time to study. When he goes out he wanders down to the shore; like his poor father, he loves the sea passionately."

Then he turned all the other way; wonderfully inconsistent ones these recluse scholars, the law of probabilities hath no bearing with them. "Let him come and sit with me an hour, we will talk together about the future which he is entering. Commencing a course of erudition is like setting out upon a long journey, and advice beforehand sometimes saves roundabout progress, taking up time without valuable result; not that I would interfere with the programme of his studies." She felt proud he had tendered the request and was grateful.

"I propose to take Violet for a nice long walk upon the Downs to-morrow morning, and my son shall sit with you while we are absent; it will do your girl good, she has not been out enough of late." This remark appeared graciously thoughtful to him, and so the arrangement was decided.

Next day, soon after calling, the widow took Violet off with her for a splendid run upon the heights, and many were the injunctions as to the care to be taken of his darling; he soon felt dull with her away from him, and became fretful under the burden of being unable to accompany her himself; his thin white arm went astray upon the coverlet, a thin white hand clutching the old-fashioned many-coloured curtain at the head of his bed; wistfully looking between the dark bed-posts at the window-framed view of the Downs: his pillowed head was raised slightly, so that he could lie and gaze upon them. With all his nerves keenly alert, dreading the knock at the door which would announce his visitor, whom he now regretted having invited, and quivering in-

"Good morning, dear sir, I am sorry to see you so ill!"—Page 353.

tensely upon the soft knock being heard, followed by the entrance of the boy, who looked in his face with an appearance of sensitive deference, and a solicitous tenderness that was like a light from within.

"Good morning, dear sir, I am sorry to see you so ill!"

"Wrong boy, wrong; there's nothing the matter. You thought I was going off like your poor father, I suppose? That's the worst of it, if one does take a little rest in the form most convenient and agreeable, people run away with the idea one is seriously ill,—going to die in fact!"

"On the contrary, my mother told me she thought you would be about again in a few days; you were very weak, but she hoped you would soon get out."

The invalid raised himself by an effort upon his elbow, and half fiercely asked, "Whatever business has your mother or anybody else's mother to authoritatively declare I am suffering from very weakness? I'll show you, if the fit seizes me, that I can get up and mount yon hill! Things are coming to a pretty pass if a man can't recline on his own bed without all this fuss being made of it. What have you come here for?"

"To sit with you; a pleasure that will, I know, be all upon my side: yet, I confess it is a pleasure I have longed for!" Geoffrey Hamilton looked up to see if the exasperating smile bore the pretty speech company. No, it was a thoughtful face, not smiling.

"Queer lad; are there no boatmen to engage your fancy, implements at the farms or on the land, no young men of the villas with butterfly-nets. Your friend the parson—what is the old man doing that you should come to me?"

"And why should I not come to you, if you are good enough to have me? If I worry you I will go when you bid me, but if I may stay I will make little noise and try not to displease."

"But you do worry; I can feel your knee against the bed now, it goes all through me; and I don't like anybody standing staring and appearing to wish to do something enthusiastic. Some people are like galvanic batteries, and you are one of them!"

"I will sit down, sir, if you please."

"Yes, but be careful, the chairs are old and creaky: if you pull that one forward bear lightly upon it, the castors are rusty or something, and make a horrid, disagreeable sound. Your mother must needs move it yesterday; nearly killed me —not but what I'm strong enough—don't mistake me."

The boy removed a small parcel from his pocket and commenced to untie it, the rustling of the crisp white paper in which it had been enfolded with such nicety, disturbed the susceptible invalid; quivering in every limb he angrily desired his visitor to discontinue. "There's nothing I do think comes up to the horrible rustle of a sheet of paper, unless it is a silk dress; put it down, please!" By this time, however, Master Evans had taken a small bottle from it, and looking down, he said softly,—

"When poor Papa was overworked and low he used to take this and derive much benefit; as we had some of it left I dared to bring it with me, thinking, perhaps, you could describe the ingredients of which it is composed; I take such an interest in chemistry." This was rounding a point and a dangerous one; his real object was to try and persuade their friend to try the mixture, which, composed of phosphates, iron, and other recuperative qualities, had proved of service to the overtaxed preacher upon several occasions. For some moments the invalid remained without speaking, then he said wearily, as though the final blow had deprived him of his remaining strength, "Throw it out of the window, or else take it, and yourself off together!"

"If you wish it, sir; but perhaps you will tell me first, I am sure you are familiar with the science?" Spoken gently, but with calm self-possession, and not showing symptoms of being hurt by the uncouth treatment he had received. The Master of the Bishop's House raised himself upon his elbow.

"Don't you know I have been a student of science all my life? Is my midnight lamp under such a bushel you cannot see from your part of the village that while the dullards sleep a man is here spending life in investigation, and then you ask me to be analytical over some quack's bottle of trum-

pery wash! What on earth are you thinking of? Insulting me it appears when I am unable to resent it." Then the turn, to which now that he was weak he seemed subject, stole upon him, and irresolutely, yet with decreased violence, he said, "Give it me!" Taking it from the boy, whose cheerfulness and refusal to be affronted would have favourably impressed a more rocky being than this old man, he smelt and tasted it, and then affirmed he knew nothing about it, but added half-surlily that he might leave it on the mantlepiece.

"Shall I read to you a little while?" looking lovingly towards the old books scattered about, a look the Master caught corner ways, and appropriated as a piece of feeling in spite of himself. How it sunk into the heart with a new strange warmth!

"*Can* you read? I hate gabbling, while an affectation of oratory is detestable!"

"Let me try; if you do not like it, I will leave off."

Mr. Hamilton directed him to the formidable volumes, and bade him select a work of Cornelius Agrippa from the pile. It was *The Vanity and Nothingness of Human Knowledge* by that old writer, and Master Bertie Evans handled its worm-eaten covers gingerly. Some grass from the Downs, yellow as the pages, served for a book-marker, and he commenced at that place. After some minutes Mr. Hamilton cried,—

"Put it down, please! I don't say you read badly, but I suppose it's because I'm not used to it. Without being an unpleasant voice, yours has not attained the mellowness essential to the comfort of a sick person—or rather (hastily correcting himself) I meant to have said a person whose nerves are not so strong as they ought to be, considering the out-door exercise I've had. And it may be my fancy, but there's a little affected way about you I don't quite like. I wonder whether that tenderness and thought are genuine or put on?" (musingly, half to himself.)

"I never told a lie in my life!" said Bertie, with a hot cheek.

"Nobody said you did!"

"But you are questioning my acting one!"

"If you put yourself into a questionable position, don't be offended if awkward inquiries are made."

Master Evans recovered his good humour immediately, and said, "I beg your pardon for speaking out, sir; I should have known better."

"You should know better than to apologize when you are not in the wrong."

The boy looked up with a brilliant face; the kindly remark gave promise of consideration after all, at the hands of this cross-grained sensitive student. How he longed for some sign of his relenting; it had been a thankless office thus far: perhaps he could say something that would more happily impress the sick gentleman; with some apprehension he remarked,—

"I wish I might accompany you on some of those longer walks which Miss Violet cannot take with you, sir!" He endeavoured to speak without any extraordinary eagerness, but at the same time as though the arrangement would be a pleasure to him. Mr. Hamilton raised himself in the bed, and rested his arm on the pillow, while he half irritably asked,—

"Will you please to tell me what there can be in the companionship of a person like myself to make such an infliction agreeable?"

"Learning; which it would take many such walks to fathom; and wisdom which neither tutors nor schools seem to impart." And the answer pleased the Master mightily, but he said, "I wonder where you picked that pedantic phrase up?" The boy did not reply, he was not going to be again betrayed into a warm retort to be afterwards regretted. Then Mr. Hamilton made concession. "I don't want to repulse you if you think there is the chance of your acquiring any knowledge of use to you now or at a later period of your life. When I am strong enough to take these longer walks, I shall be glad of your company." Bertie felt that he was making progress and was well content, and, not wishing to trespass too far, thought he would gently rise for departure. The conciliation of anchorites is always a troublesome piece of business, and so Master Evans had found it; but he was altogether unprepared

for Mr. Hamilton's peremptory request that he would keep seated. "You have but just come, and now you want to be off, it's not worth disturbing me for!" Thereupon the visitor seated himself, with an air of immeasurable delight, which the sick man noted with secret gratification. And shortly after that they found themselves talking as though never a contrary word had been interchanged between them, and time passed quicker than ever before in Geoffrey Hamilton's experience. It was genuine pleasure to impart his store of wisdom, especially to so rapt and attentive a disciple. The enthusiasm of the boy was contagious, and put new life and vigour into the nerveless recluse, and when at length Bertie went home, both he and his new friend were mutually pleased with one another. Not the least of the boy's pleasant recollections was, that the Master had expressed a hope that he might see him again that week. And the next time Bertie called he was received with friendliness and courtesy. When a nature like Geoffrey Hamilton's is courted from its armour, when its bristling points of antagonism are changed for tendrils of an equal sensitiveness that will cling with as resolute tenacity, then all the wealth that is in such a nature is for the first time seen and understood. These two became great friends; and, after Mr. Hamilton got about again, constant companions. With more familiar knowledge of the boy, that uneasy sense of possible hazard attending similar friendship between Bertie and Violet passed off, and the recluse did not deny himself the pleasure of his young daughter's company also upon the occasions of those pleasant walks with Bertie.

So the delicious time of dreams came to Violet, the happiest time she had known. Her father was kinder, and more human, and she felt she owed it chiefly to their thoughtful friends at the cottage, but did not forget the old pastor—her silvern playmate—who had long been hoping for this change.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LONDON AND OLYMPIAN HORS-D'ŒUVRE.

Confusion was rife in the board-room above the London and Olympian. There the Directors had met to consider a more than usually serious situation, indeed since the memorable Percival meeting there had not been so expressive a demonstration of opinion. The gentlemen of the Bank were assembled to inquire into enormous deficits, discovered by accident, and disbelieved by the more unsuspecting members, until ocular proof was placed before them of the heavy losses sustained by the Bank. Then, in the face of the astonishing frauds discovered, this gathering was hastily summoned, and the usually placid and satisfied gentlemen were roused to an excitement at once (as the senior partner painfully remarked) indecorous and unprecedented. It is not pleasant for a committee of staid and elderly gentlemen to discover that they have been befooled by some one in whom they have placed confidence, and depended upon for that conscientious service not always expected of the less confidential. Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., was profoundly put out, and some idea of this important gentleman's grievance may be drawn from his own remark to the gentleman next him, that if he had suspected that such a thing were possible in the London and Olympian he would have resigned and realized his shares in favour of the Bank of England.

In the heat of the animated discussion, the white-haired senior partner rose, and half nervously indicated his wish for silence. "I think," he interposed mildly, "we shall better advance the matter by a more systematic consideration of the points at issue, and not to lose the suggestions and opinions of

our friends, perhaps it will be a safer plan if one speaks at a time?" This bland hint stemmed the torrent of indignant eloquence, and the members addressed the meeting one at a time. Not for graver weight, but by reason of superior impudence, Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., undertook to speak first, and it was in this wise: "Gentlemen,—When, many years ago I consented to become a Director of this once respectable Bank, I was most positively assured by our friend in the chair, then as now representing the head of this firm, that there had not been, and could not be any unpleasantness embarrassing to a capitalist or painful to a gentleman. I will not say our friend might have foreseen the possibility of some such affair as is now unhappily occupying our attention, but I must gently remark that he ought to have strenuously opposed the appointment of the scoundrel Miles to the responsible position he has lately filled, and which you will all remember I resisted to the utmost of my power!" The speaker paused and looked daringly round from face to face as defying any member present to challenge the unblushing assertion. The gentlemen of the Bank entertained a hazy sort of idea that Mr. Gripper's resistance had not been so determined as represented, but not feeling quite sure upon the point, they contented themselves with twisting the tag-end of the recollection silently in their mind, neither confirming nor denying the statement. A course that did not, however, suit the senior partner, who, with a little fluster and a rising colour, exclaimed, "I beg your pardon—I—er—you—er—there is some mistake, Mr. Gripper; I did not nominate Stephen Miles, I was extremely reluctant to move in the matter, and was guided entirely by the wishes of the meeting!" The senior partner wore a faultless frill upon his shirt-front, and diamond studs, and above the violence of his sorrow at the mistake which had occurred, this specimen of the unrivalled skill of his laundress rose and fell with a significance that should have moved the phlegmatic Gripper; but no, he turned as with surprise at the negative remark of his senior. "There can be no mistake, sir, I dare-say I can even recall your words upon the occasion: I think they were, 'I have carefully observed Mr. Miles, and he appears very diligent in fulfilling

his duties. I am not prepared to signify any gentleman whom I would appoint in preference.' Possibly our friends will remember the remark?" Yes, they remembered it, or something like it, which was near enough, and bowed assentingly. It caused the senior partner to feel as nearly angry as this placable old gentleman ever did feel, but he acted as they used to act when swords were worn at the side,—bowed with courtesy which pardons while it does not yield. Then the partner second in order by years and position, a stout rubicund person, warm of hue and temper, and possessed of pertinacious fondness for arguing and debating, sifting evidence, as he called it, and who would cling to the last thread of a discussion with persistent obstinacy until but a thread was left to hold on by, next addressed the meeting, without preface or appeal.

"What I want to know is, why this fellow who has decamped was not checked back regularly, and so pulled up before; it's a dead certainty there's blame somewhere, but who the devil to single out for censure is at first sight difficult of solution. When, however, we come to go into the pros and cons, and investigate the surroundings, it appears to me our friend Mr. Gripper knew about as much of this young man as anybody."

"Sir," began Mr. Gripper, becoming very hot.

"Don't interrupt me please," added the stout and rubicund director with spirit; "we agreed to speak one at a time I believe, and if I remember aright, you've spoken, and if you've not, perhaps you'll wait while I speak; and what I particularly want to know is, why no inquiry was instituted at an earlier stage of the proceedings; why, in fact, this young man has been allowed to go on pretty well as he liked, perpetrating a succession of misdemeanours, and fraudulently appropriating to this terrific extent? There must be some gross mismanagement somewhere you know, and what I want to know is, where? It is far from my wish to bring a charge of culpable neglect upon this body, or any individual member thereof, but it bears it upon the face of it, and sophistry never yet averted the just course of an inquiry! Proved then that blame exists, it has to be apportioned or directed to a given point, the question

at issue resolves itself into a plain statement, and what I want to know is, why it was not resolved before? Hastening to the opposite angle of the argument, I may observe, that any man possessed of the consummate villainy, which appears to have been this Miles' noticeable trait, and supreme chief quality, any man, I say, finding he was unsuspected, nay almost encouraged in his temerity, would prosecute to a further, nay the furthest extreme, the wrong-doing by which we are so greatly the sufferers; and what I want to know is, why wasn't he suspected, and whose obtuseness is responsible for it?"

The third director considered that his friend had concluded his remarks or ought to have done so, and without rudely interrupting him, for he was an eminently polite and affable person, contrived to introduce his opening remark at a pause between the other's loquacious sentences; the remark was this: "We have been hoodwinked!" Whereat the cross-eyed gentleman at the extreme left touched the gentleman next him, and said in a low voice, that it was undoubtedly true the whole thing had been seen in a wrong light from the beginning. The third director, who was of aristocratic appearance and leanings, and by polish was the direct opposite of his friend who had last spoken, then went on to make a short address, with the graceful prepossession of a Chesterfield. "There is a certain indignity, gentlemen, attending the duty we are performing; it is humiliating to our self-respect, the fineness of our principles is outraged. As loyal subjects of her Majesty, we advance the interests of this great land in the Funds, upon a system of honour and integrity which we each feel pledged to preserve; and the least approach to the injury of this basis of right dealing affects our inmost sensibility, whereby you will admit, all true honesty stands. When at my house at Surbiton I received the brief note of our friend, the chairman, intimating that something was wrong, and requesting my presence at this meeting, I assure you, gentlemen, it was one of the most anxious moments of my life. Until our interview in the parlour before your arrival, I had not the least suspicion of the nature of the trouble—imagined it to be something connected with the Foreign loans, but when our friend commu-

nicated to me that our confidential manager had betrayed our confidence, it was a deeper blow than could ever arise from the mere fluctuations of business. I at once said, 'I never liked that young man, and always entertained an uncomfortable feeling in his company;' in short the vague presentiment of this, to which I could not then have given definition, was ever present. Gentlemen, I always experienced grave doubts concerning the guilt of the previous manager, Percival, whom you dismissed in so rude a manner; and I fear, gentlemen, a serious error was then committed!"

This conservative and gentlemanly director then sat down; he evidently had not been speaking from notes, so the trifling inaccuracy regarding his share in the dismissal of Mr. Percival passed. A fourth quietly stood upon his feet, plunged his fat hands forth as though about to dive, drew down his pair of snowy cuffs, fidgeted his scarf-pin—it was a silver dog-head, and the ears kept catching in his beard at every sudden movement, which twinges caused him to feel cross. He darted with a barb-like expedition after the subject occupying attention and brought it up wounded, flayed it, and upon the board-table dissected it with maleficent expedition. "The London and Olympian has been pillaged, through the medium of forgery, to an extent that has shaken it to its foundation, by the instrumentality of the person filling the most important position connected with its management. That person has absconded; the round sum-total of his embezzlement, so far as can be calculated by falsified entries found, and absence of entries altogether, will not be covered by a sum less than 10,000*l.*! With the fruits of this peculation to aid his escape, and with the start of three clear days (it is known to you he plausibly asked for leave of absence to visit his sick mother), it will not surprise me if Scotland Yard fails in tracking him, and meantime it behoves us to consider what is to be done? That the Bank will suffer in credit as well as in substance is certain; we had proof enough of that this morning, when, shortly after the rumour had spread, three of our oldest depositors gave notice of the removal of their balance. For a double calamity of this unfortunate kind to befall us, within

a term of two years, is disaster enough to shake the most solid concern. I don't want to breathe suspicion of a panic, but in my opinion a sudden, instant, and skilful coup, is necessary to reinstate our prestige and, possibly, to sustain our credit. It is one of those emergencies not to be fathomed, but which time, like the proverbial sneak it is, converts to one's hurt, and to the discomfiture of shareholders." Pushing back his cuffs, which the motion and emotion had lowered below mark, and smoothing the broad outlying folds of his coat, this gentleman resumed his seat. There was a pause. Then—

A fifth spoke, without rising; he was the prime minister of this financial body, and dotted on his thumb-nail with a gold pencil-case while speaking. "Does our friend wish to signify by use of the expression 'a coup' acquisition of increased capital, the promoting of a private loan, the realizing by local stock, the selling out, or the contraction of floating capital? Perhaps our friend will specify?"

"I had no particular method in mind, Mr. Goldworthy, it simply occurred to me as the politic course, if taken in time; and calculated to readjust our position."

"Of course, very proper; and the method to be adopted!" returned number five, looking towards the Chairman.

"If you will permit me?" The senior partner rose to speak, and all became keenly interested in what the white-haired pleasant-mannered gentleman said. "I do not put my suggestion arbitrarily, I will merely propose it, and leave it with the committee to accept or decline as they may think best. We have discovered that the charge unhappily made against Mr. Percival was unfounded; a communication to that effect should be made to him without delay, together, I think, with reassurance of our esteem and confidence. My proposal is—in justice to him, and in the interests of ourselves—to cordially invite his resumption of office here upon the same footing as before."

"Won't do," muttered Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., "now he's had the idea put in his head he'll avail himself of it, if only out of revenge; he's got it in him if he didn't do it, and we're sufficiently in a mess without any of Mr. George Percival's superfine help."

A sixth partner begged to take a different view to that of Mr. Gripper, and to concur with the proposal suggested by their respected friend in the chair. Mr. Percival had been greatly liked by their customers; his return to office would certainly counteract one of the unpleasantnesses, and he was warmly in favour of it.

A seventh had pleasure in thinking the same, and he was of opinion Mr. Percival had from the very first studied their best interests, and worked with indefatigable industry at all connected with his duties.

"His literary duties," said Gripper, Esq., snappishly; "we don't want a man here whose time is given to scribbling behind our backs, and who would creep into the position of gentlemen of regular occupation, when his proclivities are all in the direction of a Bohemianish mode of living."

"I think you take a harsh estimate of Mr. Percival's principles, Mr. Gripper," said the senior member with friendly remonstrance. "I am convinced that during the long period of his engagement here he devoted every minute of his time to the conscientious performance of his by no means easy duties."

An eighth speaker thought the question opened another of equal importance, to which it was united—if they did not re-elect Mr. Percival it was imperative some other gentleman should be appointed.

The discussion as to the advisability of reinstating Mr. Percival in his old position of manager, was still sustained with spirit, and it was ultimately decided to despatch the Bank messenger to his house and request the favour of his immediate attendance if he happened to be at home.

Transit from one part of London to another is a matter of such magical celerity that they expected him within half an hour, and meantime, discussed the awkward nature of the proceedings so far as Stephen Miles was concerned, and it might have done that amphibious being much good to have heard their criticism at its most candid height.

The ninth speaker, a tremendously solemn personage, celebrated for his closeness, and a melancholy verging upon the

hypochondriacal, opened his firmly placed lips, groaned inwardly, and with a dull pathetic intensity said, "The saddest part of this very sad trouble appears in the hypocritical arts practised by this irretrievably bad man, and when we contemplate the example thus held up to the juniors, we may well experience the profoundest grief; we should exercise the completest supervision, to observe if evil effects are germinating, for, my brethren, er, hum, dear friends, it but too often follows that contamination corrupts successive grades, when an elder yieldeth unto the devices of the Evil One." They were not sure they had caught what he meant, but they preserved the outward and visible signs of respect. One middle-aged gentleman opposite, with a pair of violet-coloured glasses bridging an impressionable nose, stared hard, yet with awe, at the speaker, regarding him as a teacher. It was indeed known that he sometimes addressed religious associations upon vital subjects, and as from time immemorial the religiously-inclined banker has been a more than usually venerated professor, this gentleman who preserved the prestige of the London and Olympian in a pious sense, was looked up to and estimated at a high standard, which, however, wouldn't continue very much longer if things went on as they had been doing.

Since this friend had shunted the question into a new groove, and encroached on the moralities, the tenth speaker sought to improve the occasion, being under an impression that good effect would follow a quiet word or two with the clerks; having them in after closing of the Bank, and with friendly, impressive earnestness, talking with them, and dwelling particularly upon the reward of the honest and high-principled here and hereafter, depicting in warning periods the punishments befalling the wretched backsliders from financial rectitude, and the betrayers of human faith in consols.

The gentleman remarkable for closeness, whose daughter it was traditionally reported had been wedded in a gown of green leno trimmed with water-cresses, did not commend the proposition. He feared, he said, it would be misconstrued, would exert a contrary effect to that desired; it was not, he thought,

a fitting occasion for official exposition; nor did circumstances, he believed, justify the course.

The previous speaker, who was troubled with habitual indigestion, took a bite at a ginger-tablet carried in his waistcoat pocket, and the eleventh speaker calmly, and with after-dinner flexibility, favoured with a word or two. In his opinion, formed after a life's observation, the ground-work of all their own and all similar evil was attributable to three flagrant and notoriously mistaken institutions; first, the heads of departments in Banking establishments were paid too liberally, it awoke desire for more, whereas a contracted salary presented ever-recurring quarterly meditation upon contentment with little;—secondly, the hours of business were not long enough; where a man got home by five or six o'clock it afforded an entire evening for the evolving of mischief, and he thought it a great mistake; "Run the hours of business on to seven or eight o'clock, so as to break their evening, and only to permit of a saunter home and quiet read before bedtime. I am satisfied this would operate with salutary results, and that both the young men and ourselves would benefit;—next, I entirely disapprove of holidays, which I am sorry to say, appear upon the increase, and which are fraught with terrible temptation and ill effects. I can understand the hard-worked manufacturers, sons of toil, and shop-people even, occasionally needing a change, but what is there in so essentially light, and non-laborious an occupation as that with which we are more immediately connected to warrant the easy-going treatment and observance it is the custom to extend?"

The speaker was in the midst of this wonderful plan of reform, when Ex-Manager Percival knocked and entered, with the old business-like manner that sent a thrill through the length of the board, and the forgiving affable courtesy we should expect from the man was also apparent.

"Good day, Mr. Percival, we are glad to see you, and are obliged for this prompt attention." Thus the director at the corner nearest his entrance, while one and another nodded pleasantly and with the utmost friendliness. George Percival felt surprised, but supposed they had discovered their error, and

in his heart thanked God if it were so, for the horrible charge had oppressed him like a nightmare, although he said little about it. He walked to the head of the table, and with a respectful word or two asked their pleasure.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Percival, for your personal response to our message; sit down, sir, we wish for a word with you."

He did so, with perfect self-possession, guessing what was coming, wishing it was over. The senior partner continued,—

"It is our happy duty to acquaint you with the fact of your being entirely cleared in our judgment of the charges sometime ago made against you; and for which we desire to offer ample apology, with more sincere regret on my part, and I am sure I may say on the part of my friends present, than can well be expressed. It is our wish to indemnify you in some way, and we shall therefore pay to you or to your account in the Bank your accustomed salary for the entire time you have been away, and which you will oblige us much by simply regarding in the light of a vacation. We shall also have much pleasure in reappointing you Manager of the London and Olympian, if convenient and agreeable to you to resume work here!"

Although moved exceedingly and a prey to varying emotions Mr. Percival contrived to maintain an outward calmness, but with polite firmness to acknowledge and decline the proffered trust.

"I thank you, sir, and gentlemen, for the good will and confidence you entertain towards me; I am always grateful for esteem, and to be cleared honourably of an unjust accusation, is what I have never ceased to hope for: but I have not supposed for a moment I should be invited to resume office here. I may as well say that my present engagements would not permit of it even if I felt comfortable in so doing, which, candidly, I should not; all the same I thank you, and truly hope you may be successful in your efforts to obtain a conscientious high-principled Manager!"

"We will try to do better than we have done, anyway;" muttered Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., "we shall have to go a

long way to do worse." He was looking straight at the clear broad brow of the author. With a little cough of annoyance the senior partner explained,—

"Mr. Gripper is alluding to Stephen Miles, Mr. Percival, who has systematically falsified our books." George had asked no questions, this threw light on an old mystery; he was surprised, and also experienced sorrow. It did not controvert the venom underlying Mr. Gripper's remark; and, not as bearing malice, but to settle all up now they were upon the distasteful inquiry, he thought well to say,—

"No, sir, Mr. Gripper's remark was directed at myself. For some time he subjected me to a series of petty annoyances, and chiefly brought about my disgrace; to effect which he descended to private meetings with Miles, and stealthy visits to the Bank. Had my engagements permitted my accepting your offer, I would not have returned here until Rehoboam Gripper's name was erased from the list of the London and Olympian Directors."

Mr. Gripper was about to reply angrily, when the senior partner requested there might be no disputation in the board-room. And—

"You are quite sure we cannot induce you to reconsider your decision, Mr. Percival?"

"Quite, sir; but I thank you for this proof of restored confidence, which is valued by me exceedingly."

Shortly afterwards Mr. Percival retired with the pleasurable conviction that his innocence and integrity were again fully established; a satisfaction attended with encouraging feelings that would prove helpful to him.

Gabrielle's gratitude when told of it was, if possible, deeper than his own; she did not say much but was tremulous with emotion, and leaving the room she went to her chamber, and upon her knees by the bedside she lifted up her heart, and could there express all upon which her tongue had been tied when with him. Wondrous was the fervour of her thankfulness; sorrowful in his sorrow she rejoiced when he knew joy.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE CONFIDENCE OF GABRIELLE.

Gabrielle felt strangely alone when George had left them ; the evenings were long and wearisome ; all day there was nothing to look forward to; the house seemed despoiled, the rooms to have been robbed of their homeliness and comfort. There was a great bare blank; it was what men and women call "loss." There was a grim, unkind solitude; it was what the suffering call "despair." So gentle, so uncomplaining, so persistently attentive to work and duty, they who loved her never guessed it, the old people going down the vale, to whom this unmarried daughter represented so much; who was so dear they never thought there might be yearning upon her side for a change. If so, it did not make itself conspicuous. Gabrielle was eminently one of those who conceal and shelter their finer emotion.

Yet she trembled when the next day her mother said, "Better give George's room a good clear out." George's room no longer! A good clear out, why her face was averted whenever she passed the door going to and from her chamber. Dear old room, she would have gone over every inch of carpet kissing it; no more would it be trod by the feet of her girlhood's hero. But her mother was of a practical turn of mind, she tied a pocket handkerchief round her neat morning cap, called the girl from the kitchen to bring brush and dust-pan, broom and tea-leaves, and proceeded with her "good clear out." And it caused her daughter a sharp pang to see the well-loved easy chair briskly wheeled on to the landing, the little table where he used to sit writing to so late an hour, which was sacred to her as an altar, carelessly crowded with trifles, every

one of which had an eloquence of its own ; the book-shelves on their cord were taken down and set compact upon the floor, while the books that he had used were bundled without ceremony into the upper division of a cupboard. They were all known to her, old friends, conned over in his absence to see new markings, each page pressed to the lips he never kissed, nor ever wished to. It is a fatal relationship is this of cousinhood ! There was the inkstand with old pens, all used by him !—and she reverently picked them out of the dust where she found them thrown, while none of earth saw the care, and consigned them to safer keeping in her pocket. The footstool tumbled into the passage for use in their common sitting-room she would remove to her own chamber, and thereon would kneel at prayer-time. Here was the brown sheepskin rug from before the fireplace, and she quivered with pain as she recalled his once saying, " Only fancy, Gabrielle, a little fairy-like girl curled fast asleep on my rug ! " It was a sad ordeal for Gabrielle, that turning out of his room ! How she worked ! Her mother thought, much gratified, " Gabrielle is wonderfully well and active ! What a blessing is health ! " and began to feel poorly immediately, leaving the rest of the work to the wonderfully well and active, who, when it was done, changed labour, and in the kitchen prepared some delicacy for her invalid.

She kept all her feeling under : but like the pictured passion on some old shield hanging upon a wall, while dim light makes indistinct the love-lines, and weaves a pale central haze of grey, it was there hard graven, and terribly vivid at times when the fierce light of sudden pain, as on that morning, beamed full upon it. Vividly and often came to her mind the poem of a graceful lyrist :—

" Life, indeed, is not
The thing we plann'd it out ere hope was dead.
And then, we women cannot choose our lot.

" Much must be borne which it is hard to bear :
Much given away which it were sweet to keep.
The deed that never hath been done, the tear
That never hath been wept,—who knows how deep

These lurk in unlived lives? Ourselves behind
Ourselves we leave, and miss what most we seek:
In our own memories our graves we find,
And when we lean upon our hearts, they break.

"——The thing which must be, must be for the best.
God help us do our duty, and not shrink,
And trust in Heaven humbly for the rest."

This was her creed, and in the quiet service of the home as well as in the daily ministry amongst the poor, she lived in consonance with that inner, loftier, more spiritual principle, the guiding influence of her life. And the days were quietly uneventful now, still as dreamy summer sabbath afternoons,—just that Christian idealism, just that dutiful affection in the home,—and that was all. Are these quiet-crossed lives, thwarted of their hope, happy? Very often; for they possess peace which represents much on earth. And has Gabrielle's story ended here? Not at all; there is more to come, a struggle, a victory, and a more perfect experience of the principle than is this still sabbath-afternoon life.

Such grief as hers may slumber, but never dies: and when once neglected for another, it only moans for the last poor justice. It is only when alone, the most comely mask of all we wear, *resignation*, may fall, and a return be made to dreams that seem so far away, so full of music. The great mystery of suffering in its gloomy sublimity was in her case without its great compensation, Love, the all-powerful healer; the suffering was there, stark, bleak, bitter; but there was no love, that she knew of. Many thus wounded find the solution of sorrow in work, the impassioned enthusiasm goes into it, and that work becomes a safety-vent. One powerful cause of woman's electric perfection in authorship is that faculty of compressing all her soul into her subject. The pulse of her firm right hand converts the pen into an instrument of electricity; it becomes a conductor; the cool precision and methodical arrangement of the masculine writer would chill the splendid impetuosity which has given the world some of its best. The fire that burnt in the heart of that Lady of Lesbos, whom the ancients termed the tenth Muse, is not dead, so far as its inspiration

goes. "Poetry," wrote Mrs. Browning, "has been as serious a thing to me as life itself, and life has been a very serious thing. I never mistook pleasure for the final cause of poetry, nor leisure for the hour of the poet." Gabrielle's nature was so delicately sensitive that even poetry itself, the aliment of her soul, conspired to crush it. This exquisite morbidness, rather the morbidness of angels than of women, through poetry found the outlet for the spirit's pain. When the soul that sings such silent song is understood, in its beautiful, unearthly, unstained perfection, we may see the millennium of idealism. But there was no half-mournful, half-pleading regret; she had accepted her destiny, and rather possessed an aroused and arousing faith, that will not despond, will not be lowered from its calm pre-eminence.

There is a word that means so much, yet tells so little, that sways with significance of trouble, and breathes soft and sweet of an unforgotten past—Divided. Yet what sweetness may pervade garish and bitter circumstance, even as the inspiration of some rare odour floats through those old poem-tales of Arabia, wherein the cool, pure, blue song lies back upon a throbbing sky heavy and hot with colour.

Fortunately the time had passed when emotions changed by the mere catching of some glance. The heart was bared to sensitiveness by the uplifting of love's veil, but it was spared for a little while the pain which eyes may all innocently inflict.

And there was no relenting. She did not spare herself. When once the fiat of duty has arisen within such a nature, the sophistry of tears falls like dew upon the rocks of Indus, and sighs are waste weeds that are cut to the root with decisive strokes of the pruning-hook. The ideal resolves into one of actuality. The good is awake, supple, prompt. The inner life is alert, ready to resist, strong to endure. The time was at hand when Gabrielle should crown this, when a great victory should make perfect the ideal of her nature, and the womanly in her character, when life would reach its highest point, and the spiritual cover the earthly as with a garment from above.

* * * * *

When Andrew Wilson had spoken of George Percival to the

Minister it will be remembered that the latter was strangely moved, by the mention of a name well known to him. Amy's frequent allusion to Mr. Percival's help and the untiring interest he had taken in their fortunes, her affectionate manner of breathing his name, the tenderness with which she described the old man's gratitude, and her tears while dwelling upon the sad episodes of that anxious time, so impressed Mr. Garland, that he resolved to find out this kind-hearted, large-souled fellow, and tell him of the old man's pathetic death, while reassuring him as to the welfare of the little girl. The risk of being recognized did not trouble him, the lapse of time and change of features precluded likelihood of it, but in the event of such happening, he knew enough of the Percivals to feel satisfied his visit would be treated with every confidence.

Having ascertained Mr. Percival's address, the Minister proceeded to call. He found him within, and at work. The extreme order, the atmosphere of scholarship, and the grave thoughtfulness of the young man pleased Mr. Garland, who, at ease and akin with the author's pursuit, derived as great pleasure from the interview as did the other. Mr. Percival admitted his delight at being called upon by one whose writings he had long admired, and whose piety and goodness had caused him to wish some day or other to meet so eminent a man. Not disconcerted by being recognized, the Minister communicated the purport of his mission, and Mr. Percival was greatly moved to hear of the death of his old friend. Almost the first question he asked was relative to the clerk's little girl, his affectionate heart thrilled with solicitude on her behalf; Mr. Garland at once explained matters to him.

"You are interested in a child yourself, I think, Mr. Percival; Andrew Wilson said something of the kind!"

The author's brow clouded.

"For a time I was, very much so! And you know, Mr. Garland, the frequent fate of idols of clay—we lose them!"

"Unfortunately I do;" the Minister's voice was tremulous with emotion.

"What steps do you propose to take, sir, in regard to Andrew Wilson's child? Forgive my asking, I have been so

long indirectly interested in this little girl; I love children deeply!"

The fresh candour, the gentleness, the chivalrous regard for childhood, won the Minister's most cordial appreciation, and he replied,—

"She is now with my housekeeper, until I am successful in finding her a happy home, where she would be well looked after and treated with consideration. In due time she would be able to earn her own living, should it be necessary, although I prefer waiting until I can find a home where her future as well as her present might be looked upon as provided for."

"All that you have said, sir, touches a chord inexpressibly tender within me. My quiet home, its books and studious occupation, and some engaging little one to break the spell of over-work, is my conception of the perfect in domestic life."

"As an old and staid married man, Mr. Percival, permit me to add one other item we steady-going folk are apt to consider an important one—a loving ministering wife. I am privileged to speak from the experience of having possessed a home having that sweet associate in sympathy, and also with being deprived of it, and I do assure you, no man of the refinement distinctively yours would ever be of two opinions about the balance of happiness."

"I do not dissent from you in the least, sir! I yield to no one in my estimate of the value of a good woman and loving wife; but this has no bearing whatever upon the charm of an engaging little one in the house."

"Except this, that a wife is exceedingly useful to look after the engaging little one, if for nothing else!" And as the Minister made the repartee, the kind smile giving pleasant point, he certainly thought he had the best of it. "Besides," he continued, "children require a deal of supervision, you know, Mr. Percival, and a literary man is the worst of all overlookers, being always absorbed, easily worried by small cares, seldom relaxing to that recreative extent demanded by companionship with childhood, and needing more intellectual company than childhood affords. If you were married and felt disposed to

carry out your plan of adoption (as to which, by the way, I don't know whether you are serious), if you offered to bestow upon my friendless little *protégée* the comforts and care which I am sure she would receive in a house of which you were the head; entertaining the sentiments you do, it would be the product of happiness to both; and your definition of an 'engaging child' would, I am sure, be exactly realized, for she is both pretty and fascinating, although, perhaps, a little uncultivated."

All this time Mr. Percival had been gravely attentive. The Minister's proposition, half serious, half bantering, yet all through in characteristic sympathy, gave him cause for quiet reflection. He wished the proposal might take definite form.

"I am a man of very plain speech, Mr. Garland, and you are a Minister of the Gospel, consequently accustomed to treating matters decorously; I will therefore, if you please, suppose the arrangement you casually allude to having tangible effect. In that case, is the little girl given up absolutely?"

"Absolutely, sir; no poor orphan, sad to say, was ever more entirely destitute of any interest in her well-being: at this moment she has but one friend, myself, and I shall never lose sight of her! Wherever the home may be, whoever I may permit to take charge of her, while their control will be absolute I shall reserve the right, as I think it my duty, to continue her friend; not on the principle of interference, but in order that she may feel she has a friend and a home in addition to those where she will be reared. It annuls the horrid feeling of dependence, and counteracts the slavish experience of being so totally provided for."

Mr. Percival bowed. This subtle, tender thoughtfulness for the waif captivated him, and he replied,—

"She would need no other friend in all the world, having one so good and true. All the same, I have no objection to become the guardian for whom you are in search!"

"But the lady, sir?" asked the Minister, gratified, yet still with an eye to the item he considered so all-important.

"I think I can speak for the lady," replied Mr. Percival thoughtfully; "but let the other be settled first!"

"Well, I declare you are incorrigible—you remind me of the man who bought his horse first and then built his stable."

"Quite right too, I should think; it would have been stupid to build upon expectation."

"Yes: only while he was building, the horse ran—"

"Or was stolen!" added the author with a wry face, while the Minister laughingly invited him to return to luncheon with them, and see the subject of their interest for himself. This Mr. Percival willingly assented to.

Amy, with her unreserved and affectionate ways, her quick intelligence and charm of manner, made a very favourable impression upon her future protector. Thus strangely commenced a union of perfect unselfishness on both sides, and of love that increased with every year that passed.

When George Percival left the Minister's house he went on to Queen Street, where he found his cousin alone. She was sitting by the window at work: no books, nor manuscript now. The face was paler than of old, and more aged, but the sweetness, the resigned look, the deep spiritual light, the far-seeing reliance upon that Higher than earthly ties, were all increased. Gabrielle had suffered, and the suffering had not made her strong—far from it. None but herself knew how weak it had made her; but it developed the gentleness while rendering the constancy magnificent.

So George told Gabrielle all that had occurred, and she turned now hot, now cold, and terribly agitated, yet subduing outward evidence of a severe and cruel struggle. Then George stood manfully face to face with this rare friend of a whole life, whose gentle ministry was even as a diadem, and whose loving worth needed no testing or proving, and he said,—

"Come and be all that our friend has represented—the sweet associate in sympathy—the tender helper in my charge of the child—the loving, ministering wife!"

Holding his hands forth to her, and grasping hers, placed in his so warmly he never felt their trembling, their throbbing change from heat to cold.

Her lips were pressed close, her cheeks were colourless, her voice was distinct and clear.

"Yes, George, gladly; ever your associate in sympathy; your tender helper with the little one; but,—not your wife. Cousins still, dear, please!"

Then with meek dignity she left the room. And in her chamber where but One saw, *conquered.*

Gabrielle was true to her resolution, and through all those years she kept his house, had but his dearest interest at heart, and from first to last taught Amy *how* to love him.

The pangs, the agony, the exquisite ordeal, were never betrayed; no shadow of discontent or bitterness: not an interval's diminution of tender gentleness in her treatment of the child and conduct towards George, to whom indeed she was as she had ever been, no more, no less. Through all the years of widening honour and increasing prosperity and fame, by which another was to profit: through all the years of that caressive fondness, which a maiden yields to him she loves, and by which the patient worker outsat her own weak self, and became strong by virtue of the heroism: through all the years her cousin's fondness was changing to the grand deep passion, when for the first time she saw him *love:* through all, she still lived on, aye, and still loved on; mysterious heart of woman.

She had foreseen the issue when the proposal came, and for him gave up herself.

And even as where one suffers another joys, Amy, grown beautiful, and with intellect moulded by his teaching, with a happy home found after all, and a kind regardful heart all hers, knew most perfect joy, and certainly strove to be worthy of it. And when the Minister would call, and George with proud delight admitted that it was to him they owed their present happiness, but one knew of the other side; Mr. Garland had long enough detected Gabrielle's share in it, and gave her a divided measure of that rarer friendship he gave to Constance, whose sister in his sympathy and thought she was. Lovely is such flower of friendship, surely of the loftier standard Addison meant:—

"And such a friendship ends not but with life."

In the Minister's regard Gabrielle joined that throng of

saddened and weary ones to whom the world is all pain, life a long trial of patient endurance. Their eyes are tearless—they have wept passionate floods over broken idols, and can weep no longer: the tranquillity of resignation that comes after fierce battles and mighty struggles is theirs: the lips are roseless, drawn in by rigour of their pain: the hearts have lost the high hope that once made earth a long reach of sunshine and music: darling joys, once too precious to speak of, lie waste, and scarce bearing to be thought of; and they come with their agony lines, and clouded faith, and bruised patience, and benumbed affections, with all their sad retinue of sorrows, to the comforting words of some such man as this, and the tender and feeling look more priceless than the words.

The many acts of unspoken heroism in these quiet lives find no chronicle. Emotions to which no utterance can be given are the soul's true eloquence. Trembling, checked ambitions, which thrilled the tedious hours musically, too sacred ever to be described, too exquisite ever to be defined; the unfulfilled, fond wishes and dear dim dreams; the great soul-yearnings, and the still small voice of hope; these die, too often, and life's altar is strewn with disappointments, when there are none to chant the memory, and a world is grey with the ashes. Holy, bruised loves, crushed ideals, lowered from their faultless standard, glorious faith and trust-broken charms of spoilt illusions, lie on the heart like dead flowers—faded, loveless, but fragrant for so long! And a word will set the chords vibrating: sad music of harps when every string is broken; a look will flash upon the dark corners of the life sudden vividness, that beats broad until the memory and the pain step from behind, bared and bitter. There are points in some lives like shrouded mile-stones, whereon the distance to Pain and Death groweth never faint: they are not close together, but so blank and dispiriting, all the courage of great hearts, and all the strength of great days, cannot but sink beside those stones. Long sweeps of sorrow and the voiceless crushing of mighty trouble, when there seemed no light in heaven, and the fair gate of Hope was closed, when worlds could not buy sympathy—even the mute love in the faithful eyes of some

hound, when all was dead and dumb, even the dear forget-me-nots once encouraging tender promise. There have been struggles that can never be recounted, and there are the brave fallen by their banners, their morning star bedimmed, their blue sky dark with the clouds that had no silver lining, their fair brows low lying and uncrowned.

These were the calm, still natures Garland loved. The lowered voice, the tranquil mien, the subdued manner, and that light in the eye which tells of much lost, yet of more gained, all were the passport to his most precious friendship; and of those ennobled by this repose, although she had spoken no word of it to him, nor he to her, Gabrielle was ever beautiful in his esteem.

Who of those passing her in the street, not looking back for anything that struck them in the face, yet haunted by the expression, would have guessed all that had influenced the sweet light shining there? How many of her poor, leaning on that, dreamed it had come of pain, beside which poverty was stingless, and all other ills were without hurt!

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT SUMMERS'S LIBRARY.

About this time all the walls and hoardings of London displayed announcements in large ornamental letters that Miss Vandaleur would shortly appear, with her celebrated Comedy-drama Company, at one of the West-end theatres. A reputation of no mean order heralded the lady's appearance; in the provinces she had won golden opinions for a refined type of performance of the pathetic and poetic kind, and there appeared to be no doubt as to Miss Vandaleur's ultimate position on our stage. The lady came to England in the first place with Australian honours; the chief towns of Queensland, Victoria, and New South Wales had formed a favourable, indeed flattering, estimate of her powers; and when her agent arrived from the antipodes to organize a starring tour through our provinces, a round of engagements was signed without difficulty, and the appearance of the new actress arranged for an early date. In due course the lady arrived, and made a successful *début*. The critical and discriminating audience present at her first appearance in this country, allowing for ruggedness and excess of emotional force, discerned rare histrionic excellence, particularly in that lighter expression of dramatic sensibility popularly associated with the French school. Miss Vandaleur scored a success, and was applauded; in successive towns she attracted large audiences. It was natural this brilliant artiste should desire to perform in the metropolis, and her ambition was to be gratified. It was settled that "The famous Australian Actress" should appear at a West-end theatre; walls and hoardings

were conspicuous with one huge word, VANDALEUR, paragraphs in theatrical journals acquainted the public with the lady's triumphs in other parts of the big world, and the windows where portraits of celebrities were wont to stay the crowd exhibited a fresh face of a new type of loveliness, a mien and carriage that were emphatically queenly. In these portraits Miss Vandaleur looked about twenty-two; but she was in reality thirty-two. In all her journeyings, and they covered an extended area, Miss Vandaleur was accompanied by a tall, fine, handsome fellow, who seemed to do nothing but devote himself by day to providing for Miss Vandaleur's comfort, and by night to admiring her acting. It was understood this was Mr. Warburton; in private life the lady passed as Mrs. Warburton. Nobody believed it, but it was true nevertheless; aware it was not believed, she was yet too disdainful to flourish her certificate in every town she entered. Mr. Warburton had been a bushranger, but when first he made the acquaintance of the lady he was possessed of a comfortable little property on the Yarrowee, by Ballarat, and was so still, for that matter. All the comfortable little properties in the world would never lessen nor limit Kate's love for the stage; so, finding he could not cure nor quell, he, like the sensible man and devoted admirer he was, accompanied her whither she would; and he was useful at times, even if it did cast a reflection on her. Fortunately reflections leave faint shadows. Kate did not mind in the least, quaffed champagne, lived high at the best hotels, conducted herself with propriety, indulged extravagantly in dress, jewellery, and flowers—and paid for them, refused to take presents, was exceedingly attached—for an actress—to her husband, loved little boys, pug dogs, beggarmen, and sculptors, and, like Mistress Gwynne, was exceedingly good to the poor, far more so, indeed, than is etiquette amongst virtuous women. At Ballarat, the man with the comfortable little property intimated that he was a widower; at Ballarat, the woman with beauty, fascination, and talent, intimated that she was a widow; neither believed it, but it came to the same thing, and all doubts were consolidated at the altar. In the interests of honour we may bear witness that

these asseverations were literally true; the first Mrs. Warburton was the daughter of a gentleman who would do anything to oblige, in the interests of the flourishing general Store of which he was sole proprietor. The first husband of the lady had been a sculptor of rising fame and marked genius, whose gifted life had been all too short, and all too troubled during that brief span, by this beauteous creature's longing for the stage. Her one child, a little boy beautiful as herself, had been placed with her father, who was poor, but so kind—she knew how kind he had ever been to her, knew he would be thus to the boy, and in this loving care placed him before leaving for Australia,—we should like to say "with something of a pang," but it was scarcely so. When ladies are leaving for abroad to form professional engagements, little boys are rather in the way.

This was Kate Vandaleur. We think we have heard of her before in the progress of this history. Yes! But we have not heard all; how that even in the bosom of such an one, after a while the glory of footlight victories is wearisome in quieter moods, and the feverish excitement attendant upon ambition is painful compared with the domestic happiness of other women whom they meet in private life, and whose unruffled existence excites the sometime envy of those held captive by the tyranny of popularity.

A certain shop in the occupation of one Mr. Summers had, in addition to the prestige for elegancies characterizing many West-end establishments, been, for a considerable number of years, thought highly of in the district; first, for a large well-stocked circulating Library; secondly, for supplying the public with box-tickets for the theatres; and thirdly, for its extensive and choice array of plain and coloured photographs of notable people of the day. In short, Edward Summers' was a distinctly fashionable house of business, much patronized, and the owner whereof had, by scrupulous attention and uniform courtesy, realized an independency. The shop was near to the house of Mr. Greville Lovelace, and that gentleman was one among its numerous patrons; and since he disliked entering the shops himself, he did as others do, sent the least stupid of his ser-

vants for such works or articles as he might require; and of late, for more special commissions, he had despatched his pupil, who would perform them with as nice perfection as he could wish.

One day Arthur was thus on literary errand when Mr. and Mrs. Warburton were in the shop upon business connected with their box-office; the lady's eyes were riveted immediately, her stately grace unbent beneath the sublime prompting of maternity, and with great agitation she went to the boy and addressed him by name; then, when he looked up with the splendid eyes, passionately eager, wistfully loving, she knew her own, and kneeling took him to her heart. Mr. Warburton, familiar with his lady's liking for beautiful boys, and aware of the cause, was accustomed to her taking a warm interest in their behalf, but had never seen her thus affected; and he went to her with a word or two of kind remonstrance. The gentlemen of the shop attributed the outburst to "the custom with Australian professional ladies," and attended to their business: but the proprietor, who was of deeper and superior insight, at once invited the lady and boy into the house, and conducted them to a pretty chamber where they could talk in private at leisure. Mr. Warburton warmly thanked him for this timely and considerate politeness, and remained in the shop.

Alone with her son, the woman who once played this scene, and with such force and pathos that it made her reputation—few knowing at the time how she had suffered,—with loving fervour took him upon her knee, parting the curls, gazing through tears at the fair brow recalling his father's, and looking deep into the eyes so full of poetry and love.

"And does my boy remember me?"

"I should not, had you not known me first. I have been cherishing a recollection of some one, but it was no one so grand as you are—I think more like what you used to be."

That went to her heart; he recalled the quieter days, a recollection just then of pain.

"And did you think, my dear, I should never come home to England any more: that I had forgotten you, and—and Grandfather, dear Grandfather?"

His face clouded in an instant. Without replying he said

with tender simplicity,—"Of course you cannot know—and we moved after you had gone, to a poorer place, but more in the country—he is dead." This was uttered with the mournful echo which almost signified that the recovery of this brilliant and courted mother scarcely compensated for the loss of that beloved guardian of his youth. She felt this also; but the grief she experienced upon hearing of her father's death, if of no intensity, was sufficient to overpower those other emotions. She shed a few more tears at that, tears of sorrow, more of penitence: she knew well enough that never a word nor deed on her part had done aught towards linking him to life, or strengthening the frail tendons which keep the heart from breaking; and she wept, as the thoughtless do weep, once in a way, and when a past trails up with its reproaching weird reminder, hugging her boy close, as grateful that this was still left her to do better by and to love—between intervals of stage love, and to be thoughtful for—until the crowd's applause rendered this new affection dim, faint, stripped of its novelty, lessened of its pleasure.

"Where are you living now, Arthur?"

"I am apprenticed to a gentleman, a sculptor; and I like it; he is very kind, and helps me with my studies as well; I love him for it, and all he has done for me, and I hope never to leave him!" This said the boy, vaguely apprehensive that she would wish to remove him, a course he would have opposed with firmness. No, the lady had no wish to do so, she felt glad to hear he was following in his father's footsteps, glad to hear he was so well provided for and happy. The passing emotion which had moved her, vanished, not quite so quickly as when she was overcome by sudden pathos in the progress of her dramas, but yet did pass, leaving her composed Mary Warburton, and, above all things, Kate Vandaleur! Any situation imperilling her existence as that largely placarded being, would have been most remorselessly warred against. But she must see her boy often—a stroke of hopeful tenderness in the stipulation, and Arthur affectionately welcomed this promise; and when he went to tell his friend of the strange occurrence, that friend, while gratified it was no worse, resolved that for the future he would send some one else on errands to Summers's Library.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT HAPPENED UPON THE ROAD TO SHOREHAM.

WEEK-NIGHT services are mainly supported by the very good and the very bad; the medium class of attendants upon religious duty confine their worship to the Sabbath. Mr. Garland had made an undoubted impression upon John Beech, who, under his improving influence had not only become a respectable member of the community, but also a thoroughly pious and reformed character; a great transformation was here, in the conversion of this man, to reverent conduct, honest dealing, and serious reflection. John Beech was regular in his attendance at the week-night services, but if Mr. Garland failed to preach he would walk out again, with the bluntness which still remained an unconvertible trait. It was a dogged regard he entertained for the Minister; he must have the Gospel at his hands or none at all; had the Minister been removed or 'translated,' Mr. Beech's piety would have gone from him. His conversion was not built upon a very reliable basis, it will be thought, yet so it was, and there are more of the Beech order about. Herein lies the secret of success attending some Revivalists. Mr. Garland was not a Revivalist, but the principle, and the influence were similar. It is the power of sympathy; some bodies are sympathetic, and yield generously their sublime gift to suffering humanity, others may be refined sevenfold, but never a drop nor grain of the precious quality are they able to communicate. Mr. Beech was rich in English obstinacy, and though an angel had assured him of it, he would never have believed the gospel was as priceless from another's ministry, or that any

among the sons of men could be as good or better than his friend.

The elder Mrs. Beech had been sent for to join her husband, greatly to her wonder and satisfaction, and from that time strife ceased to be the daily portion of the poor woman. It seemed a new lease of life, it gave promise of a calm ending to her years, and her heart warmed with gratitude when John said, "The Minister has done it all."

Upon the cab rank at the Old Steine, Driver No. 175 was one evening hailed soon after dusk, by a tall man of business-like appearance, yet wearing an air of pleasure-seeking. By the gas-light, Beech saw a white hat with a black band round, beneath which, sharply prominent features, a florid face, and a voracious-looking head; under the ears and chin a standing collar, richly illustrated with little black imps brandishing pitchforks; below this mediæval study was a long brown coat, very much the worse for wear; and around the throat tied in a fashion popularly supposed to be native to sailors, was a crimson neckerchief. The gentleman, whom cab-driver No. 175 imagined to be connected with the turf, carried a short and thick stick under his arm.

"Shoreham Gardens!" said the tall man, taking his seat. This was a good fare, for the Gardens, a resort much frequented by summer pleasure-seekers, was some five or six miles along the coast, west. But Mr. Beech was honest now and he said,—

"If it's the Gardens you are going to, sir, they're not open!"

"Never mind!" said the man in the brown coat, lighting a cigar: "drive half the way and back; it's going to be a pleasant evening, I can see!"

Beech demurred no longer, and the man was driven on. Along the sea line, past the palatial stretch of dwellings, and then out into the dark country; a lonely road in spite of distant lights, and the glow of red behind, above the town of Brighton. Past a toll-gate where, while the driver paid, the traveller leaned back, so that the light in the window did not fall upon him. Then, on to a darker extent, where lights became fainter and the red glow more dim. The sea sounded

dismally here, the pale light that seemed to hover upon it being distinct and ghastly. A cart passed them, John Beech called a cheery "Good night, mate!" and the man answered in the same civil strain. A star was born, twinkled feebly, and shortly died, and the arch was gloomy again; the night must have been chosen for its gloom by this gentleman partial to a country drive, for when that star appeared he twirled his cigar at it defiantly, as though to frighten its feeble light away, and he did so, or at all events it was seen no more. No vehicle passed them, nor any one upon foot, there was no house near, and the track, desolate by day even, at night presented a blankness and dreariness apparently relished by the traveller, for he laughed to himself horribly, while fumbling at something stowed away in a pocket deep in his old brown coat. The low shore shelved to the water, with a ridge of waste land between it and the road; on the other side was a broad area partly cultivated, but all unseen during this night journey, and possessed of no especial beauty at any time. The man in the cab had proceeded far enough for his purpose, and he called out in a jovial manner to the driver to stop.

"Stretch my legs, I think." He stepped lightly on to the road and shook himself, patted the horse, walked round the cab and said, "I'll settle with you now, my man!"

He put his hand under his coat, for his purse Beech supposed; he brought, however, a weapon from under, which he held behind him while looking carelessly at the girth.

"Something loose here, my worthy friend, and we shall be upset if you don't look out!"

John Beech came off the box to the side of his mare, and stooped to look at her harness. Then the man in the brown coat raised the hand grasping a deadly weapon, and felled the other with one blow.

"A message from your friend, Noel Barnard, Beech: no answer required!"

With which brutal pleasantry he discharged another crushing blow, and bending over the poor wretch, observed curtly to himself, "Finishes that little item!" The victim of

this savage assault was motionless as the dead, with blood flowing profusely from two terrible wounds. Then Bartholomew Rolf turned the horse and cab into the waste, to wander at will, cast the weapon used to the black line of shore, to be washed hence by the waves, or left, he cared not which, and betook himself to walk to Portsmouth.

Anxiously Mrs. Beech awaited her husband's return, long after the usual time of his coming home. Edward Street is noisy and given to brawls and turmoil, and the woman stood at the door impatient, hoping her husband had not got into any trouble, nor was staying away purposely in consequence of anything she had said that he might not have liked. He might have a longer fare than usual, a party somewhere, or people going a long distance home from the Theatre.

A woman passed whom she knew; she was returning from a vain effort to induce her husband to come from the society of congenial tavern mates, and Mrs. Beech accosted her.

"Have you seen my good man about, ma'am?"

"No, but I've seen my bad 'un, and it's sight enough for one night;" and she went in bitterly.

Mrs. Beech waited another hour, and then went down to the rank. The men were changed for the night duty; no one had seen 175 take up a fare; but his cab was absent. She went on to the yard; it was not there. By lantern-light a man was cleansing some mud off a wheel with a wisp of straw; she asked him if he had seen her husband. He said he didn't know her husband, and didn't want, and women were not allowed down the yard at that time of the night. She hurried to the master's house; lights were in the lower rooms, where some of his friends were carousing. She knocked humbly, and asked to speak to the master a moment; he came out into the passage, heard her, and said she was a fool, and if his men's wives began bothering him, he would only employ single ones. Time was when Mrs. Beech would have fought him for the argument; now she was an altered woman, and she retired sadly and quietly. All night she sat up waiting for the absent; she had received kindness from him of late, and a man is double a man and thrice a husband who is not niggardly

with his kindness. The grey dawn arose to close her watching; people were about early in Edward Street; those of the house were astir; and then the woman fell asleep in her chair, grey and white, and alone, to be roused shortly by men outside and shuffling of feet upon the landing. They had brought him home, and a sorry sight it was the woman awoke to. A market-gardener's cart coming to Brighton saw the body by the wayside, and pulled up to help; the man was not dead, thanks to the cool breeze from the sea, and he faintly told his name and lodging. Then the gardener with difficulty raised the helpless sufferer, and placed him with great consideration in his cart, resting the feeble being against his sturdy self.

"You're in for it, old fellow. What's come to ye?" he inquired, slowly and kindly.

"Murder!" moaned the other.

"A quarrel, maybe?"

"Yes, a quarrel; and it's gone agin me, as I allus thought it would."

And Beech was taken to the house in the street named, and borne up the stairs by strange and rough, yet kindly hands.

One carried the news to the police, and they visited the scene; another carried it to the master, and he went down to his yard; the woman carried it to the Minister, and the Minister came to the man.

The police took particulars of the place where the body had been lying, and a root of the crimson-dyed grass. The master found his cab and his horse uninjured, the latter having returned deliberately and at her own convenience to the yard, so the proprietor returned to his roll and coffee, intending to send the girl round later to inquire how the man was proceeding. He supposed he had fallen from the box, and vowed he should be dismissed from his employ. It was of no consequence, the Minister found the man dying; he had sent his wife for Mr. Garland, not for a medical man. "The Minister will be of the most use to me now," he said, so the Minister came instantly.

"Close the door, please," he asked softly; "and tell the people below to be quiet for one hour." He believed his poor

convert would not outlive that time. Seating himself by the bed, he took the brown hand in his, and pressing it spake with infinite tenderness and gravity,—

"Tell me anything weighing upon your mind, all you wish done, or whatever of the past may be a trouble. Then I want you to forget everything, and give your whole thoughts to the solemn change you will enter upon so soon."

It was said very sweetly, not to frighten in the least, it almost carried happiness with it.

"We will quite finish with earth first," continued the Minister, "and then there will be nothing to draw off your attention from the more joyful prospect breaking upon you."

"I've been a bad 'un," moaned the man.

"Fear not! Really repentant, you can leave all in the hands of your just and forgiving God." He had been going to say "judge," but with a delicate tact pre-eminently his own, foresaw the term would pierce the quivering conscience.

"My wicked deeds and dreadful words!—My life's bin the blackest going!" He turned restlessly, writhing with the agony of that swift review of crime.

"My friend," said the Minister, softly, yet with firmness, "at this moment, when you have so short a time to listen to me, I would not deceive you by one word, and when I tell you the deeds and words will be forgiven you if you are truly penitent, you may verily believe your God in His mercy will, for the sake of His dear Son, in whom is your trust, blot the whole of them out of your life and His remembrance."

With another pressure of the hand, touching for its affection, the man murmured, "I am! I am!" and then raising himself slightly, he looked over towards a rude trunk, and in a low voice begged the Minister would take from it a sheet of paper: upon the mantle-shelf was an ink-bottle and pen. "Now write," he begged, and the Minister quickly made space for the paper, and prepared to write as the dying man dictated; the voice grew fainter and fainter, but all he wished was written upon the paper; then the woman was summoned, and in their presence he signed it, and the last sad scene took place.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GATHERING OF THE VULTURES.

The Tribunal of Goddesses was sitting upon the great Garland case, and there was a crowded Court. It arose in this manner:—Miss Penelope and her invaluable jury had not been in the house of the Comdarlingtons two days, before they scented something wrong, and found that it would be necessary to hold the Assize in Brighton. It was with the Comdarlingtons' Minister that something was wrong: they had entertained grave suspicion of this at a distance, had felt specially called upon to visit this gay and dangerous town, and despite Lady Comdarlington's repeated assurance of his being such a love of a man, they were determined to go on with it, and place the popular favourite in his true colours before the world. They were upon their mettle, the issue of the metropolitan campaign had sharpened their appetite, and rendered them more than usually acute.

They commenced with caution. Naturally the person who would, no doubt, be intimately acquainted with all that was going on, would be the leading office-bearer of the church—the approach to an office-bearer is by means of his wife; dear Lady Comdarlington knew Mrs. Lurch from having met her at bazaars and other places, (indeed, Mrs. Lurch, with fussy pretension, made herself known everywhere,) and this valuable auxiliary was called in. It was the preliminary movement, setting the barrier an inch or two aside, whereby at an enlarged gap would rush in the whole horde of vulgarians. For could not Mrs. Lurch report that dear Miss Caddie, that inestimable spinster, had seen the Minister standing before the portrait of

Constance Evelyn, the lovely creature who had suddenly quitted Brighton and was now, as could be incontestably proved, living with Mr. Garland at that lonely house which nobody would ever pass and nobody could ever find; the housekeeper of this establishment having been conveniently sent off. Every goddess bristled at this sensational account, and when Mrs. Lurch majestically erected her imposing cap, and, looking the convocation in the face, submitted the desirability of calling in Miss Caddie, there was a general expression of approval.

Lady Comdarlington presents her compliments to Miss Caddie and hopes for the pleasure of her company to tea. Mrs. Lurch drove off in the brougham the bearer of this missive, and presently returned with the charming Lottie, fluttering at the honour, all unconscious of the inevitable "few friends to meet you," and almost overcome on entering the drawing-room at having to encounter the stony inspection of so many stern-looking maiden ladies. Miss Caddie was naturally possessed of extraordinary sweetness, and this agreeable quality she had cultivated to a pitch of exotic pleasantness; thus this mixing of cream and sugar with so much vinegar might, one would fear, have produced an utterly unpalatable concoction, but then it was just as possible some eminently seasonable and piquant salad might come of it! Miss Caddie was not impressed by the guests of her hostess, their coldly critical aspect seemed calculated to warp even the delicate surface of scandal itself, and this presiding oracle who was in her way supreme, felt jealous for the honour of her unclean pickings. Miss Caddie's long connexion with Japan had spoilt her taste for beauty, that is to say, for Saxon beauty; thus the impressive Court then sitting did not woo her to that close and ardent confidence she had anticipated. Nevertheless Miss Caddie, like her really good tea in the bequeathed tea-pot, was to be drawn, and finding her friends reserved was greatly mortified. Mrs. Lurch explained aside to dear Lady Comdarlington that her friend had left at home an inseparable and bosom friend, whom she thought Miss Caddie felt grieved to leave there alone, although she would on no account have failed in her attendance upon Lady Comdarlington's pleasure. At which the

Countess naturally expressed regret that Miss Caddie should have run away from her bosom friend, and nothing would set it right but that she should send her own carriage for this friend of their friend Miss Caddie, who was entreated to write a tiny note at the elegant escritoire of the Countess, and did so with a relish, sincerely desiring the invaluable bosom-one might be let in for a similar treat to that which had befallen herself.

Dear darling Kitty, it is all right, Mrs. Lurch has managed it, you are to come; such an exquisite house, (we are improving our visiting acquaintance, dear!) Don't lose a minute, you will find a Honiton collar in the small drawer, and my curl comb on the looking-glass; ever your attached friend, enjoying herself finely.—C. C.

"And I hope she'll like it when she gets here!" said the tender-hearted correspondent, biting her lip and not knowing which way to look under those twenty-six fossil eyes, for the goddesses did not move, nor speak, but sat staring stonily, watching events, and waiting.

Mrs. Lurch (who was very rarely discomposed, least of all by people staring, for she always thought they were admiring her cap) and the Countess kept the conversation from flagging, but an agreeable diversion ensued owing to the unexpected arrival of the Hon. Mrs. Glover, with Miss Fanny Glover, accompanied by Lady Pepper. These ladies being accustomed to good Society, and in the habit of meeting mixed parties, were no way discomposed either; and when her ladyship said "Now you will stay tea with us, and have a little quiet chat?" they, having come on purpose, did so; the truth being, as they soon explained (greedily caught up by the insatiable goddesses) that they were greatly concerned about dear Lady Ellerby and Mr. Garland. He had been seen riding with her, seen to enter the house, both in the unsuspecting Lord Ellerby's lamented absence; it was very sad, it was no business of their's, they did not care a pin, but knowing how intimate their friend (the Countess) was with both, they had just come to see if she knew a few particulars. Such a shocking thing! They had always

thought so highly of the Minister; the air was thick with rumour, they feared something terrible was about to happen; they hated an exposure above all things, and having been members of his church it would be so much worse; it was a sort of reflection upon themselves!

At every fresh word the heads of those who had come purposely to try the case, bobbed and craned and the sensitive cartilage of their ears appeared to distend with hungry zest. Their leader was making mental note with the obstinate system of some uncommonly shrewd, sharp, and sour counsel.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich arrived. She wore the dark green silk, with the Honiton collar; the sand-coloured curls were adjusted with consummate care, and not in the least disarranged, for the clever Kitty availed herself of the opportunity to come without her bonnet; "they'll be obliged to send me home as well if I don't go in my bonnet," reasoned the gushing maiden, never above taking an advantage: another thing, it was not every day Miss Ticklewich had the chance of being driven along in a carriage with a private crest upon the panels, therefore she would let her friends and the public well inspect, upon this occasion, her three-quarter, framed, bonnetless portrait, by keeping in good view of the rest of Brighton, plodding along upon foot. And the poor who passed—*his* pensioners—little thought her one of the witnesses sent for towards establishing the guilt of him who so entirely lived for others.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich arrived just as Lady Comdarlington was saying "Well, I always told Flora what a duck of a man he was, but I had no idea she thought so too!" And further remark was checked by her ladyship rising to welcome the winsome visitor. Miss Kitty's artlessness took at once. Although in years as old as the leading goddess, she was still one of those endearing creatures the whole band of sisters instantly felt they could pet and cherish; and the feeling spread, so good an effect dawned with the appearance of the vivacious Kitty. Miss Caddie, not to be out-shone in sweetness by her bosom friend, relaxed visibly, and anon the assembly was like unto a bank of honey-bees.

After tea proceedings commenced: over tea the talk was

chiefly upon dress and local events. The Countess, a martyr to languor, surrendered her post of honour to Miss Penelope, who acquitted herself with characteristic grace. Not unusually, therefore, Miss Penelope retained the presidency afterwards, and introduced the topic they were all dying to commence upon. Not having been a fashionable tea, nor a dress occasion, but so entirely a homely meeting one with another, Lady Comdarlington complied with Miss Penelope's request that tea should be had upon the table, in the good old-fashioned, and thoroughly comfortable manner. After tea the company remained still at the board, chatting pleasantly, Miss Penelope at the head; and when the servants had quitted the room, and there seemed an interlude of temporary quietude, she was sitting easily back in her chair and staring straight before her, into vacancy it might be thought, but really into the complex and very serious matters about to engage their undivided attention; Miss Penelope, thus preoccupied, tendered a quiet observation,—

"How are the mighty fallen!"

And immediately a hush fell upon the assembly, the next moment every one was bursting to say something, and said it; Miss Penelope had unloosed the carrion hunters, and vulture-like they lost not a moment in descending upon their prey; as with one breath, the burden whereof was this,—

Lady Comdarlington (*diminuendo*).—"We are so surprised; our friend, whom we thought perfection!"

Lady Pepper (*espressivo*).—"It is quite a blow to us, we shall never trust any one again!"

Hon. Mrs. Glover (*variamento*).—"One really doesn't know whom to believe now-a-days!"

Miss Fanny Glover (*sfuggito*).—"It's scarcely nice to talk about, but what is one to do?"

Mrs. Lurch (*pratico*).—"I've told Lurch he ought to withdraw immediately, but he doesn't see it!"

Miss Caddie (*quieto*).—"For a very long time I have had my suspicions, it has quite upset me!"

Miss Ticklewich (*teneramente*).—"The best of men are the worst, and we've always thought so!"

Miss Hebe (*puntato*).—"Apparently so spiritually-minded! Oh, whited sepulchre!"

Miss Phyllis (*lamentoso*).—"One could weep over such a fall—how guarded one should be!"

Miss Minerva (*grandioso*).—"I am always fearful for these exalted people! It is very sad."

Miss Diana (*crescendo*).—"I am sorry for the large number of families he has visited!"

Miss Vesta (*delicatissimo*).—"Only to think of the poor lost creature now at the Grange!"

Miss Hermione (*pianissimo*).—"I think I've heard there's a Moat, hush-sh-sh!"

Miss Circe (*indeciso*).—"He may have been greatly tempted, poor man! Alas! we do not know all!"

Miss Dido (*debile*).—"It makes me feel quite faint, one cannot bear too much! What's the time?"

Miss Leda (*decissimo*).—"What is there bad enough to say of such a character?"

Miss Thetis (*ardito*).—"Society should rise up against this traitor, and avenge itself!"

Miss Iphigenia (*impetuoso*).—"I think no Minister has the right to remain unmarried!"

Miss Evadne (*tranquillo*).—"One should at all times be prepared for the worst."

Miss Penelope (*ostinato*).—"But let us hear the facts of the case."

It cannot be said there was a room full, for the Comdarlington residence was spacious, but there undoubtedly was a room full of noise when the council of twenty were all talking at once.

"Yes," said Miss Caddie, "before saying anything we should hear the facts of the case; these, as I understand them, are very serious—very serious, indeed a worse or more convincing or more extensive charge was never brought against any one!"

"Quite true, Miss Caddie!" said Aunt Penelope, who thus far did not know what it was.

"It resolves itself into a three-fold accusation. First the Minister decoys hither, by offering her needy father a comfortable Curacy, a young girl whom he has known in some previous and I conceive less honourable sphere: having had the girl brought to Brighton, he has the open audacity to remove her to a village hidden away amidst the Downs, where in a mysterious old house she is the captive of this perfidious Brigham Young. Ladies, you will be surprised at my bringing in the name of that heathen prophet, it is because the other accusatory clauses justify my use of an allusion to that person. For, not content with this horrible misdemeanour, he must needs seek also to entice away the affections of a beautiful young wife—I am thinking of Lady Ellerby, whom my dear friend Miss Ticklewich saw with her own eyes in close company with Mr. Garland in a shut-up carriage. As if this were not enough the worst case of all remains to be stated—there have been darkly mysterious goings on between the Minister and this Lady Lindon people are so fond of talking about; he has visited at her house and been admitted to her private boudoir—a privilege granted to no one else,—he was at her Reception, although nowhere else all the season, and lastly has gone down and taken apartments at a cottage close to her country-seat! Now ladies?"

Miss Caddie had spoken, she felt she had spoken well, and had done her duty.

"Bless you, my child!" murmured Mrs. Lurch under her breath, and then to Miss Penelope, "I am thankful I never would consent to take the Communion at the hands of Mr. Garland!"

"Madam," replied Miss Penelope impressively, "my confidence in man is so slight I never have taken it, and until administered by one of our own sex I never will!"

Then Miss Penelope curtly turned to address the Committee sitting upon the misdeeds of the apostate preacher.

"We have all heard the report of our friend, put I must say in a concise and considerate manner, for this is not a nice

or thankful duty that Miss Caddie has so delicately performed, and I am convinced it has been a painful office to speak as she has done; but don't you trouble, my dear, you will have your reward! Now, my sisters and myself have travelled about a good deal, and unconsciously to ourselves have had forced upon us a vast amount of the unpleasant side of the human race; we acknowledge this, to the disgrace of mankind; conjointly we have tried to improve it, and have met with much opposition; from the days of Pharaoh downwards man's heart has been prone to hardness and perversity, and very often I do assure you it has been like trying to carve the rocks, so stubborn has been the reception accorded our efforts in the interests of decency and right." (Noticing some whispering, Miss Penelope stopped. It was her sister Dido who had offended, she was just asking Miss Ticklewich if she had a biscuit in her pocket, that was all. And darling Kitty found one there; it had been there some months and without paper, and she whisperingly replied while handing it, "I hope you don't object to seeds, dear!" It would adjust the condiment flavour. Quite happy Miss Dido answered "No dear," then, under the table broke it in her pocket-handkerchief and conveyed a portion to her mouth, which was constituted upon the same principle as a fish's and required to be in perpetual motion. This it was which had aggrieved the presiding goddess, and it was not until quietness was restored that she would proceed). "If I understand the facts of this case aright, the crimes imputed to this person are, so far as our present information is to be relied upon, threefold; and we have a clergyman's daughter and two ladies of title implicated! Ladies, it is a delicate piece of business!"

"For my part," whispered the Countess to Lady Pepper, "I don't see how they could help it. But there, I give him up; he really carries it too far, you know! There's moderation in all things, and a line must be drawn."

Miss Ticklewich gave a premonitory, almost a playful, little cough: Miss Ticklewich wished to speak. Miss Penelope glanced in her direction with condescension, as implying she might, if so disposed, address the tribunal. At first Miss

Ticklewich seemed inclined to simper, but ultimately signified her readiness to look at the grave side of things by becoming apparently serious. "I think it well to say," began the dark-green and sand-coloured vestal, "that when out walking the other day, my steps unconsciously wandered in the direction of Hawkingdean. (Simper.) Unwittingly I walked around the garden boundary. Without knowing what I was doing, I found myself gazing between the thickly-clustered trees, when I suddenly discerned two figures sitting close together." (Simper.)

"Yes?" The presiding lady, with elongated neck and rapt interest, in which the whole important assembly joined, awaited with eagerness the revelation their dear friend was upon the eve of disclosing.

"They were the Rev. Mr. Garland (seriously) and Miss Evelyn (very seriously). They talked; I did not want to listen, but voices, which prompted Joan of Arc to act contrary to her wishes, prompted me and whispered my duty. I listened!"

"Yes?" Miss Penelope was scarcely able to restrain the virtuous impatience racking her Amazonian frame.

"They were talking of a child!" Every goddess arose, reared, arching themselves, and red as capsicums. The other ladies, with the exception of the Countess, although not less agitated, retained their seats. Lady Comdarlington, with honeyed accents, remarked to the Hon. Mrs. Glover, "This is getting delicious, dear. But how could she help it? Bless me, I've given the wretch up! Did you ever know such a naughty, handsome, rakish, perfidious one?"

"I think, Fanny," said the Hon. Mrs. Glover, with solicitude addressing her only daughter, to whom, of course, this sort of thing was quite novel, "it will be as well if you leave the room, dear."

"Yes, Ma." Miss Glover, who looked the elder of the two, arose with her forefinger between her lips, her head inclined on one side, eyes modestly bent down, and slowly quitted the Court.

"Is there any other lady who can't stand this abominable exposure?" Asked by Aunt Penelope, with an expressive side-

look conveying to her staff that it would be more decorous to rise and retire while the business of the Court proceeded with closed doors. But all declined to catch their leader's meaning this time, with the exception of Miss Dido, who trotted out in the wake of the various elegant confections that had graced the tea-table.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich proceeded, amidst a silence painful in its intensity,—

"Miss Evelyn said, 'If our little darling could but be brought here—and I see no reason against it—it is so retired, no one would be aware of it, and if discovered, could not possibly tell it to be yours!'"

With a stifled shriek Miss Caddie sank back in her chair, feeling her laurels were already departing from her, and much she wished that Kitty had been left at home in obscurity.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ROSE RECEIVES AN INVITATION.

One day Rose called upon Mr. Garland: he at once detected it was to tell him something. To this child was extended the privilege of doing as she pleased in his study: she knelt by the table at which he was sitting and slowly taking a letter from her pocket she looked half sadly up in the face beside her. He knew there was something coming, the love he bore the child told him it was something to part them; he thought very likely she was going to school—the general ending to a friendship with a pretty child. No, this was an invitation simply, she passed him the letter without explanation, it was addressed to Mrs. Blake.

"Am I to read this, Rose?"

She nodded assent and he read it.

The Cottage, Sleperton.
Tuesday.

My dear Mrs. Blake,

Our acquaintance in the summer, although brief, was so agreeable, that I have never ceased to think of yourself and dear little daughter with warm affection: I am only sorry I cannot leave the Cottage or I should certainly pay a flying visit to Brighton, purposely to see you; but it is in your power to come and see me and make a nice long stay bringing pretty Rose along with you. I will try to make you very comfortable, and I am quite sure your dear girl would enjoy the change, for although Seaborough may be anything but a cheerful place in winter time, I assure you, at the Cottage we understand the happy art of passing the season pleasantly. I have not the

privilege of knowing Mr. Blake, but I am sure from all I have heard he is kindness itself and will not stand in the way of your visit.—At all events if you cannot come and see me, allow Rose to do so; I shall be in London for the day on Friday next, and could meet her at London Bridge, if you will write me the train convenient.—And how have you been, dear? Very well I trust; I hope to see you both looking more beautiful than ever.

You did me the honour to admire some of my sketches, I shall be happy to develope the taste for drawing which I am convinced your Rose possesses.

With kindest regards, believe me, very sincerely your friend.

Anna Vincent.

He became rather thoughtful after reading it, and then asked,—

"Well, what did Mamma say?"

"'Bother the woman and her Cottage; if she knew how much I detest letter-writing she would not take the trouble to write to me!'"

The Minister smiled at the piece of philosophy.

"But Papa said he thought it very kind, a polite attention; and that it would be a nice little holiday for me."

"And what does Rose say to it?" asked the Minister with anxious tenderness.

"I like Mrs. Vincent, she was very kind to me."

"Which means that you would like to go?"

"I should if *you* could go!"

"But I am not asked!" Playfully humouring her fancy.

"Come and see me if I do go," said the child earnestly; "and perhaps we shall be able to look at some more of the pictures in the Manor house."

"What would Mrs. Vincent think?"

This was not to be answered, and Rose thoughtfully returned the letter to her pocket.

"But you have not told me whether you are going or not?"

"Mamma said, 'She is undoubtedly clever, and it may be a good thing for Rose;' Papa said, 'I do not think we ought to

look at it in that light; your friend invites Rose as a guest, not as a pupil!' 'Just so,' said Mamma, 'but if she can, at the same time, be picking up some accomplishment so much the better; when I was a girl I was never allowed to visit where I did not learn something.'"

Rose delivered this with inimitable gravity, the Minister trifling with his pen, trying, as he had often before tried, to reconcile the nature of child and mother. He was thrilled by her rising, coming close, and entwining an arm about him, "Do *you* mind my going?"

It was so pretty, so thoughtful, he could not, if he would, deprive her of the pleasure.

"I? No, Rose; if it makes you happy. By-the-bye, do you know if her son is at home?"

A delicate blush overspread her cheeks, for a minute she seemed inclined to burst into tears.

"I never thought of that. But what does it matter if he is? I shall always be at needlework or something or other with Lorry's Mamma."

The Minister merely straightened the envelopes in the divisions of his case, placed stray sheets of note and letter paper in decorous companionship, folded half a quire of blotting paper into book shape, and boxed up loose pens wandering and mixed; then turned, taking her to him; she knew his moods too well to wonder, and with a loving smile just nestled there.

* * * * *

He felt dull when she was gone, was dull on the Thursday; and all day Friday his housekeeper saw but little of him, he was so busy writing in his study. She knew he prepared his sermon on Friday and did not trouble him.

On Saturday he called upon his poor. They thought him kinder than ever, he was always kindest when inwardly disturbed.

On the Sunday he preached two of the most impressive discourses ever heard within that Church. Beautiful Lady Ellerby did not rise to the last hymn, the spell of the preacher's eloquence was too much for her sensitive heart, emotion caused her to tremble, and she dreaded lest it should be observed.

He had been more than usually tried during the past week, all the efforts put forward with the hungering desire to discover the retreat of his wife and child had failed miserably, and he was very depressed in consequence. This more than anything seemed to envelope him in shadow. At such times small things add to the weight oppressing one, the departure of Rose was one of these: he looked upon the pew where a little face was wont to be, and saw the genial chemist, his imposing lady, and—a blank.

He was very tired and pale. Going out, he met with one of his parishioners, who remarked at once how well he was looking, some people would address their stock congratulation to the dying.

He was not well for all that, and on the Monday he drove to Hawkingdean.

His parting instructions to the housekeeper in Brighton were—"Don't send any letters on, I must be free from care for a day or two." By the evening post a letter arrived, in child-like handwriting, and bearing the Seaborough stamp. Mrs. Sanderson ventured to disobey her employer's injunction, and sent this letter on. Thus it came about the Minister received the following missive:—

Sleperton, Sunday.

Dear Mr. Garland,

I did not tell you I would write, in case I couldn't, but I meant to do so if it was possible, and I could write without being looked over, which I don't like at all; and this afternoon Mrs. Vincent is up in her room, and told me to make use of her desk and write to Mamma, telling her I am enjoying myself. I have just done so, and now write a line to you, telling you I am not enjoying myself because you are not with me—

Here there was a change into the elegant penmanship of the accomplished widow:—

I have just surprised our charming fairy at her confidence. Will you not make her happy by coming to see us, and staying some time at the Cottage? Pray do; I wish it, and shall think it a personal kindness. Come any time agreeable, no ceremony, you are always welcome. We are quite alone and Rose

sadly wants some one to take her out, I go out so little in the winter.

He thought this an odd interpolation, but read on where the child had resumed the writing:—

I am to add my persuasion, you know how I wish it, come for my sake. I get so tired of walking about by myself, and do so want some nice long walks before going home. A young lady is staying here, but she is unhappy and will not go out with me. I shall expect you with all my heart.

Your loving Rose.

He decided to go instantly, would feel glad of the change.

That "young lady, unhappy," lingered in his mind afterwards; curious, Mrs. Vincent had said "We are quite alone," it looked very like ignoring the other inmate of the Cottage. The Minister had not been over impressed by the genuineness of the lady at his first acquaintance; this, however, would not weigh in the balance if inclination prompted going.

It seemed another land by the white wintry view as the train approached Seaborough. A somewhat bare and bleak landscape, proving how incontestably the colour and charm of the summer is needed to shed beauty upon the quieter English tracts. Mrs. Vincent greeted her distinguished guest with the warmest of welcomes, and the Minister thought she improved upon acquaintance. His little friend remaining half-shyly in the background, yet bursting to spring forward, was all reserve until the lady had retired to her domestic arrangements; she then went up to him with her exquisite caressing manner, and thanked him with simplicity, and genuine sincerity, for coming to see them.

"But what about the young lady, Rose? I thought at first you were alone."

"Such a sweet young lady, but so sad: I can't think why? Mrs. Vincent is not unkind to her. I fancy she is a boarder here, and yet Mrs. Vincent wouldn't be likely to do anything of that sort, being very well off, would she? Do you know," Rose was very serious now, "there is something strange about it, for Mrs. Vincent seems to me to be always doing all

she can to set the young lady against her guardian, a Mr. St. Aubyn, and yet he placed her here—as I understand it."

Little Rose had said her say and looked considerably perplexed, but her confidence in her friend assured her that he would, if he could, explain away all the perplexity. And the Minister was disturbed. He remembered the name, St. Aubyn, very well, and recalled Lord Ellerby's narration of the facts connected with the flight of the lovely wanderer. So he asked, "Can you tell me what day this young lady came here?" She told him, he compared dates, found it the day following that of the young lady's departure from the artist's woodland home, and said, "I should like to see her."

"She is always in her room, sits at the window, and doesn't care to talk with any one but her servant."

"Her servant!" cried the Minister, with astonishment and pleasure; "a servant brought with her?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Vincent does not half like it, I think; she is very short with her, and the servant is the same with Mrs. Vincent."

"All this is singular," mused the Minister; "but I suppose I shall get to the bottom of it."

* * * * *

When Martha Saxe, upon leaving the presence of Mr. St. Aubyn, on the eventful night of their return, had gone upstairs to the chamber of her young mistress, she found that perverse, but troubled beauty sobbing hysterically; this of all things struck a responsive chord, and Martha joined her, but found time to console her nevertheless, and told her she was certain all would be well in the morning, the master would sleep on it, and receive her forgivingly when calmer. This had the effect of procuring a night's rest for the child, broken, disturbed, uneasy, fitful, but better than no rest at all, and the good woman herself watched and slept, and slept and watched the night through, in a chair beside the bed.

The first thing in the morning Mrs. Vincent went to her future charge, and found her dressed and waiting for the call to breakfast, eyes red, cheeks flushed, brow aching. She introduced herself as a very old friend of Mr. St. Aubyn's, the

friend of many years' standing; and this dear girl, whom she would love so fondly, was to come and stay with her awhile; she had a pretty residence, and would make her so happy and comfortable; and, she delicately added, this was Mr. St. Aubyn's own wish and arrangement.

Then Lena, supporting herself by resting a little hand upon the dressing-table, looked St. Aubyn's friend in the face, not defiantly, but without fear, and said, "I refuse to go with you; I don't know you, and I don't wish to! You are nothing to me. I will go to him; if he will not receive me—"

"He will not receive you. Mr. St. Aubyn has issued orders that he is not to be disturbed!"

"Miss St. Aubyn issues orders here also, madam, or did, and it will not be from a stranger she will submit to be dictated to in this house!"

Lena rung the bell with spirit, the elegant widow waiting the result with unmoved grace and sweetness.

"Will you ask Papa to come to me, or say I will go to him?"

She spoke hurriedly and feverishly, and the domestic was affected, delivering her message with pathetic earnestness, and returning slowly with this reply,—

"My master wishes me to say he is unwell this morning, and hopes you will excuse him for not seeing you; he has arranged matters with Mrs. Vincent, who will explain everything to you, miss."

"Will you be good enough to go and tell Papa I have heard this lady's explanation, and am not satisfied with it, and certainly shall not go away with her? You can tell Papa, please, I very much prefer returning to where I came from yesterday!"

Mrs. Vincent saw in this the advancement of her own deep scheme, except in the event of St. Aubyn relaxing. No; she knew the suffering nature too well; Lena's reply would only add fuel to the fire.

The answer was transmitted—that Miss Lena was quite at liberty to act as she thought proper; the child melted then, her high spirits vanished before his icy indifference, and she

wept bitterly. She knew now how passionately she had been loved, was still loved. Passive, utter, unrepining obedience would alone court, as time might bring about, the forgiveness she felt any penance would cheaply buy. She held out her hand to St Aubyn's friend; "He wishes it; I will go with you. I am sorry I spoke rudely to you."

And the friend kissed her upon the brow, with,—

"Good child! This will please him so much; come, now, let's get your things together quietly, and we'll go on to my pretty home, dear, without further trouble to poor Papa."

She cried again at that; she could fancy him shut in that lonely room, as none else could fancy it; saw him after she had gone, conceived the agony following; but she could be so true to him away there, could prove her past innocence by her scrupulous conduct in the future. It was a heart-breaking business, turning out all her odds-and-ends of apparel and adornment, lace trifles she had worn for his pleasure, ribbons that became the blush-roses upon her cheeks and the sheaf of lustrous hair his fingers would no more idle with. Her dresses were many as the months, she would only take the plainest. All was in order for packing; the dainty widow would not aid at the disagreeable office; the child had not the heart to summon the servant to help her; the slender and fragile hands were listless at the task, when Martha Saxe entered from breakfast, and the kitchen's criticism of events.

"Never mind them, Miss Lena, I'll put our things together, and good riddance, say I!"

The girl looked up astonished, but with wonderful joy in her eyes.

"I mean that you are not going from here without me, Miss; we've stuck together so long, and will do so to the end of the chapter, please God!"

"This is a very great liberty, I think!" said the widow, with the utmost composure.

"It's what we call French leave, ma'am, which in this case is better than no leave at all; but if it's more satisfactory to you, Mr. St. Aubyn's leave can be had likewise!"

"Well, it will be much more satisfactory!" replied Mrs. Vincent, thinking the application to that gentleman would settle it very differently.

Mrs. Saxe quitted the room. She betook herself to the sanctum of the master, and was admitted. With sorrow she witnessed the ravages of the struggle he had gone through; the equal friend of both, she felt deeply for this sensitive and stricken man, although, of course, not understanding as Lena understood all the super-delicacy of his suffering. He received her visit with pleasure, thinking well of the worthy soul whose devotion was idyllic in its unselfishness.

"I hope you won't feel offended, sir, if I make bold to ask for granting of the request now, which I was to have, you said last night, whenever I put it to you!"

"Certainly, Mrs. Saxe, I will keep my word, pledged to you in my gratitude; and insufficient in my opinion, whatever it may be, to reward the service you have rendered."

"It is that you will allow me to go with my dear young lady, wherever she is going, there to remain so long as her unsuspecting sin against you is unforgiven? Man is harder as well as more foolish than Providence, I reckon!"

The words were as knives; but her request pleased him more than he would reveal.

"Yes, you can accompany her, and—and—" his voice trembled over this; "send me a line now and then, telling me of—of your welfare. Never mind the writing, Mrs. Saxe," for he saw her hesitate, "I shall not look at that!"

He had mistaken her hesitation; she would write without fear; had taken care to learn that useful art, long, long ago, before the needlework, or the washing, or the baking.

"I was just thinking, begging your pardon, sir, that if so be as you would care to hear of our young lady, won't it be better not to let her go at all?"

He arose at that, stern and unyielding, in one of those susceptible moods when a hair turns the scale, and, fearing the permission would be in jeopardy, she thought it prudent to ask for a line to Mrs. Vincent, authorizing her attendance

upon the young lady; and St. Aubyn wrote this at once, Martha bearing to that lady the mandate.

Martha Saxe, attached servant, will go with Lena as maid. This will be an advantageous arrangement. *L.*

"I don't know," said the widow, curtly to herself, viewing the intrusion with strong distaste. But so it was to be, and it thus came about that Lena's banishment was rendered just bearable.

The policy adopted by the widow was to fan and increase St. Aubyn's jealous displeasure by all means in her power, which were not slight, especially by cunningly-framed letters; and to lead Lena, if she anyhow could do so, to think unlovingly and with aversion of him, having "cast her off!" as Mrs. Vincent said, and emphasized with a degree of soft and subtle apparent dissatisfaction at St. Aubyn's conduct, which could not but produce an impression.

* * * * *

And that evening, writing to St. Aubyn, the widow said,—

I know you will sympathize with me, aware, as you are of the resources of my poor house, when I tell you I have been surprised by a visit from the fascinating Minister, the literary Bayard you heard me speak of. I very much fear I shall have to report to you that the motive is in connexion with the Manor: one of his first questions concerned the health of her ladyship. I shall be so grieved if this is the case, but will write you again in the course of a day or two, and meantime will keep my eyes open in your interests. I will endeavour to prevent his seeing Lena, if possible, but he is an awful character to keep under, if there is a pretty girl about.

This devilish epistle found him prostrate enough; it well-nigh finished him. Yet it is odd how the heart clings with despairing tenacity to straws. She was only surmising, she had not really noticed anything, there were no grounds for her suspicions, and she might be mistaken. Was he not a

minister of the gospel, could such an one err thus criminally? Well, it was long since he had read newspapers, but he remembered hearing aforetime that instances had been of the minister proving all too human; but he hoped on, as we do, with that melancholy and yearning which must be so pathetic in the sight of Heaven. And then arrived another letter:—

My worst fears are realized, he has visited Lady Helen each day; and as though this were not enough, has forced himself upon Lena, and in spite of all my efforts to prevent it they are continually in each other's company. Can I tell you the extent to which I sympathize with you? But bear up, be strong; you, we, will conquer yet. Will write again soon.

The result of this was to perfect the poisonous work, when the bitterness seemed indeed to have reached its utmost height.

Still it was all true, quite true, this black charge. Mr. Garland *had* visited Helen each day, *had* forced himself upon Lena, and they *were* continually in each other's company. Very dreadful, by Mrs. Vincent's ghastly showing, but that was not the Minister's view of the matter.

Finding Lena would not come down, and correctly divining the cause, Mr. Garland sent a kind message by Rose to say that he was a clergyman, and should be happy to have a little quiet talk with her.

True to her programme of perfect faithfulness, Lena returned a civil excuse, although in her heart feeling that if she could confide all to this would-be friend, what a relief it would afford to her.

The Minister wrote a line or two the next day and gave it to Martha Saxe, for he felt, instinctively, that she was trustworthy. Mrs. Vincent was away shopping when the Minister's messenger delivered this note to the solitary child he would befriend.

Do not fear to see me, I have a loved daughter of my own, who may even now sadly need a friend. If you are troubled and sorrowing I may help you.

"And a very kind-spoken one he is, my dear, and if I were you, I'd just tell him the story from beginning to end."

"Do you think so, Martha? Dare I? What a little wretch he will pronounce me!"

"Chance that, deal truthfully with him and leave the rest."

"And you advise it?"

"I do! Worse can't come of it, better may! Shall I go and tell him to come upstairs?"

"Good gracious, no! What would Mrs. Vincent make of it? I will go down to him!"

And she did so, and met him with the prettiest expression her always pretty face had ever worn, partly sad, partly sorry, half glad, half timid, and pouting with a little rebellious curve, as though anticipating being called to account.

But he took her hand so gently and unofficially, and with so easy an air, as if they had been known to one another a long time, that she felt at rest immediately.

And he upon his side was much impressed by her youthful beauty; truly had Lord Ellerby presented a life-like copy.

"To make the most of our time, Miss Lena (you see I am not the stranger you took me for), tell me if I am right in supposing you quitted Lord Ellerby's to return to Mr. St. Aubyn's, and that gentleman, displeased by your mistaken freak, refused to accept the penitence you would have tendered; is it not so?"

"It is true," replied Lena, flushing with pain, and much surprised at the whole story being known or guessed by this calm, kind stranger.

"It proves a great love, Miss Lena, to cast the object loved from it as in this case!"

"I know it. I cannot tell you how much he loved me—"

"And still loves you; I do not need to be told. It is an unfortunate occurrence, sad for both, extremely difficult to re-adjust. As soon as my engagements permit of it, I will go on to the North and see Mr. St. Aubyn."

Lena shook her head. "The journey will be unavailing."

"If men were deterred by such fears, there would never be any good done except beneath the shadow of their own

chimneys. But you will tell me exactly *all* that befell you while away. I cannot say I hold with confession to the priest in the general way, but in this instance it is commendable. Do not be afraid to tell me anything, I pledge you my word not to repeat any portion of the story you wish me to keep to myself."

She told him everything, as he believed, with frank truthfulness.

Then he placed a hand upon each shoulder, and looking down into the clear eyes, he said, "Thank you, for honesty at least. Our friend need never fear while his little girl remains thus candid. Make yourself contented, I will help you." And he sent her back to the chamber lighter-hearted.

"I hope you won't go home until after the fair!" Thus Rose, who expected much enjoyment of this annual holiday-making, of which she had often heard glowing accounts.

"You wish me to take you to it?" Rose nodded.

"It is held here on the Green, and the shows, I suppose, are splendid!"

"Are they indeed? I don't think it will be quite the place for either of us. You must go back with me instead, and I will take you somewhere in London."

Rose thought she would prefer the fair, and said so.

"Promise me you will just take me round at all events, to look at the pretty things."

"Well, there may be no great harm in that; perhaps I will."

It made the child happy, therefore the Minister was content.

In the afternoon he paid his respects to Lady Lindon. The Manor House now presented a very different appearance to what it did upon the Minister's first acquaintance. Its sumptuous fittings, and magnificent furniture, rather startled this man of simple tastes. Surrounded by a court-like retinue, difficult of approach as some sovereign, rarely seen by the gossips, who knew but by hearsay of her haughty isolation, Lady Helen here enjoyed a privacy she had not sought in Brighton, where, indeed, she endeavoured to dispel care by participating in the usual round of time-killing engagements, in which Society

expends the better half of its hours. None of it had banished the memory of him believed lost, who now seemed from this far-away aspect so noble and good. "Why did I not see it *then!*" was the endless lament in her saddened heart. United with this was the memory of her children. "Were one or both of these recovered, I should have something then to live for." The Minister's call was an agreeable surprise.

"I did not suppose I should have the pleasure of seeing you of all people; I am very glad!"

"Thank you; presuming upon a brief acquaintance with Mrs. Vincent, who is entertaining a little friend of mine, I obtained leave of absence of my kind helpers and stole off for a few days. I came here in the summer, and was greatly taken with the pleasant walks about."

"It will be a rest for you."

"Not altogether; even here I have open to me a duty of some embarrassment, which, however, I may not neglect. It matters little where my path lies, I am sure to find some one in need of a friend, with a thinking head, a feeling heart, a helping hand."

"You are very self-denying and good!" murmured Lady Lindon; "Some one of our cottagers, I suppose? The class is always ready at narrating woes and crosses in a kindly-disposed ear."

"It is as well, if it gain them sympathy. But it is in the house of my hostess this time. A young lady-boarder placed there by her mortally displeased guardian, in consequence of the said young lady having quitted her home during his absence, gone to London, and met with the shelter offered by a good-natured, thoughtless artist-friend of ours. This is, in fact, one of the innocent causes of poor Lady Flora's distress of mind: odd how things come round, is it not?"

"Yes; but how comes she here, of all places?"

"Mrs. Vincent is a friend of her guardian's, and was in the house at the time of her return; naturally he consigned her for a season to the care of this friend."

"And she could not be in worse, or more treacherous hands!"

"You know Mrs. Vincent?"

"I used to! She brought about all my trouble: had it not been for her—but there, it is useless recurring to that time. What are you going to do for this miserable little sinner?"

"Reconcile them, and restore her, of course!"

"I wish you joy of your task!"

"I do not look to tasks for joy—that will come afterwards!"

The Minister retired, and was seen proceeding from the Manor to the Cottage by, to compute mildly, half a hundred eyes.

Mrs. Tapper, from her station in the bar of the Lindon Arms saw, speculated, worked it out with a piece of thought in her mind, and by aid of multiplication balanced it to her satisfaction. Mrs. Wallis, of the iron store, was, as she said, rivetted by sight of that figure walking from the large gate, along the roadway bordering the Green, and in at the Cottage of the widow. Mrs. Rice saw, and said she had an idea something more than usual was going on; Mrs. Rice knew the stranger's name by his letters passing through her office. All the village and village-street was exercised in consequence, and proud Lady Lindon's name was in every one's mouth; they had so waited for something to talk about, and now they had got it, and made admirable use of it. The fishmonger, Smelt, was driving his cart on the other side of the Green, and happening to turn at the time, saw it likewise, and Smelt's cart became for the nonce important as the Royal Mail. Uriah Sticky, the grocer, who supplied Mrs. Rice wholesale, was on his way thither with samples, and Uriah Sticky saw, and moaned, for the harlot spoken of in the Book of Revelation had direct reference, he believed, without any prejudice, to Lady Lindon, who bought her groceries from London. And Vault, the stonemason, just coming from the church, also saw; Lady Lindon, he had been told, wore mourning for his lordship, and Vault was heard to remark there was more plaster of Paris than quarry polish about, and this was considered a very dark saying; was regarded as occult, not being understood, the mason being looked upon with especial awe, as to some extent in open account with the churchyard.

Mr. Garland was also seen by Major and Mrs. Howard, who were even then driving up to the Cottage. Mrs. Major Howard alighted with great ceremony; the stranger might be looking; the stranger was looking!

Mrs. Major Howard marched majestically up the garden-path, leaning upon the Major's arm, and followed by the spruce tiger, bearing the military rug; for it looked like snow again.

"Good morning!" said the Major to the party, with his customary salutation; "good morning, out for a little drive; hadn't seen you since in church on Sunday; my wife said, 'We will call on our friend;' I was very pleased; but bless my soul, I beg your pardon; you have company; no idea any one was here! Mrs. Howard, our friend, has guests; we will retire: here, boy, take the rug back!"

"Not at all," remonstrated the polite widow; "allow me to introduce you? Mr. Garland, of Brighton; Major and Mrs. Howard!"

Major and Mrs. Howard could not have deported themselves with more elaborate finish had they been at court.

"This is indeed an honour," said the Major, in a low voice, but sufficiently loud for the person interested to hear.

"Major," put in Mrs. Howard with feeling, "I always told you I believed we should one day see Mr. Garland; it has long been the ambition of my life!" (half to the Minister, who, with Rose by his side, was turning over a portfolio of Mrs. Vincent's sketches.)

"My dear," replied the Major, a shade of reproach in his voice, "when in the army, I was well disciplined to believe nothing certain until accomplished; to-day I can congratulate you, my dear, upon the realization of your favourite prophecy!" and hand on heart, the Major bowed with precise etiquette to his lady.

The Minister found some difficulty in preserving his gravity; this was a new type of being; and Rose was an awkward companion, her expressive eyes were flashing with merriment.

"Let me take your bonnet, dear, you will stay tea with us?" Mrs. Vincent stood waiting, the Major's lady hesitated,

then she said, playfully, "Well, I don't know, really! I must ask the Major!"

"Afraid we're intruding!" said that gentleman with gallantry; then looking full at the Minister, "but there, I really don't think I *can* refuse to-day!"

Mrs. Howard crossed over to Rose, "Won't you give me a kiss, my dear? Ah, I thought you would; and now tell me, how is Mamma?" While thus favouring the child with her attention, the Major's lady contrived to shake back a profusion of real lace around her open sleeve, for the purpose, possibly, of dazzling the Minister by her white arm, whereon rested an imitation gold bracelet. Then veering round with august effect, and waving the hand belonging to the said arm, towards Mrs. Vincent, which sent the sleeve up to the elbow (for she remarked that he had not been looking during the preliminary by-play), the lady drew Mrs. Vincent's attention to the exquisite moulding of the little girl's forehead. "She will be a great musician, Anna! You are fond of music, my dear, I can see!"

"No, ma'am, I don't like it at all!"

The Major marched to the scene of action, and described the brow with finger and thumb, turning to his wife reprovingly. "My dear, you were in error; these organs indicate intellect; do you remember the great Duke's forehead, my love?"

"Dear Duke," murmured Mrs. Howard, with broken emotion, and using a deeply lace-bordered pocket-handkerchief. "Ah! what a friend we lost in him! I will go with you, dear!" to Mrs. Vincent, and the two left the room.

Mr. Garland had never felt so uncomfortable as with this curious pair.

The Major stood erect and commanding, looking down upon this man of the Church, with the child and the sketches, and his gravely gentle manners, and all at once exclaimed, "Sir, you have consecrated your life to a noble cause! I used to think my profession an honourable one, but, sir, yours is the mainspring of all human love and charity; I shall never forget last engagement I was in, poor fellow saved my

life, quite a Christian, sir; after his noble deed, by which he lost both arms and a leg, 'Let us return thanks!' he said, meaning that my life was spared to my country. When the Duke heard of it he gave orders, 'Bring that man before me, I will reward him!' He was not to be found. From that time I have felt unhappy; he might be in want. Imagine my surprise last week, poor beggar limped to the portico of my residence; Tabitha, my maid, about to give him some bread and cold meat and send him off, I recognized him by a scar: 'Stay!' I cried; 'it is he, by Mars!' and I pressed on to the vestibule, seized his hands in mine, and besought him to come in and rest!"

The Major paused, too affected by the vivid recollection of the pathetic meeting to remember that the man had no arms; paused, not to take breath, but to lower his voice to a confidential pitch, softly begging Rose to run and look out of the window. Complying, with a comical air, she left them for the window, then the Major continued, "I have tried to help him from my limited income: I have looked upon it in a brotherly light as due from one comrade to another, and I have represented the case to my friends who have nobly responded; one with ten pounds, another with five, according to means and largeness of heart; 'freely ye have received, freely give!' We have much to be thankful for, Mr. Garland, in the blessings of peace, and when this poor fellow lost his legs for us, that our countrymen might live at home undisturbed by the enemy, such a contemplation is to me the sublime witness of our national completeness as a body. 'Devotion,' said the old Duke, 'is the backbone of the English character, and the unselfish giving of your all is the marrow of that devotion!' and when this poor, noble-hearted fellow, sightless, was led by that little dog right up to the very doorstep of his old officer, it was almost more than I could bear, it was indeed, Mr. Garland!"

The Minister was about to express commiseration at the pitiable condition that the man, armless, legless, and sightless, and led by the little dog, must have presented, when Mrs. Major Howard entered the room, and was rewarded by a savage

look from her commandant. Despite having marred the Major's tactics, the Major's lady appeared truly resplendent, and as she sank upon a chair striking out her toe to make her silk set effectively, she had all the mien of a lady of the first water.

"I was just telling Mr. Garland of the poor Corporal's case, my dear, and remarking how much we ought to be thankful for!"

The lady had not heard of the poor Corporal before, but quite understood the valiant Major's remark. She turned with a winning expression to the Minister.

"My dear husband is *so* tender-hearted, an inestimable trait in a military man, generally supposed to be a little callous, I believe; but the Major was never *Jupiter tonans*, Mr. Garland, his *savoir vivre* procured him the special commendation of the great Duke; I am even now using up the cuff of his undress regimentals for pen-wipers, I am making, to send to a bazaar in Dublin. I don't know how your ladies find it, but I cannot get materials enough for making up, and where there are so many calls one cannot keep buying; some of our friends are very good. 'Here, Mrs. Howard, lay this out for us to the best advantage!' It takes up a deal of time, but one ought not to study that in a good cause."

Dr. Hunter, the leading practitioner of Seaborough, was seen walking up the garden path. Of course, none but the leading man would have been able to advise upon the imaginary ailments to which Mrs. Major Howard, following fashionable precedent, was constitutionally subject; the Major entertained the same objection to settling accounts with medical men as with other folks, and from the same motives. Dr. Hunter never had been settled with, there was a seven years' account for fees and medicines waiting to be arranged for: if the doctor casually alluded to it, the Major would say, in an off-hand manner, that his friends Jenner and Ferguson had never sent him in a bill in their lives; it was perfectly true, they never had. In this case the doctor cured much upon the principle his patient recovered—by faith. Still the Major conscientiously avoided the gentleman, and when he was seen approaching, the Major arose, remarking that he must be going. "I never can consent

to meet those fellows; ever since the surgeon attached to our ambulance insulted me, my antipathy has been extreme; this man Hunter is very clever; very clever, I believe, but I do not like him; he is one of the persons I admire most at a distance. I am sure you will excuse me retiring to another room until Æsculapius has gone?"

Dr. Hunter had been told of the extraordinary event, how that the clerical friend of the mysterious widow had been seen leaving the Manor House, and Dr. Hunter, who of necessity knew the Minister by reputation, was extremely interested. Any incident calculated to stir things a little interested Dr. Hunter, who would have thought it an improvement upon existing stagnation, had Lady Lindon been visited by all the clergymen in Christendom; indeed, the doctor once said to Vault in reference to the churchyard, "It is hardly worth keeping it enclosed for its purpose; better turn it over to the graziers, people hereabout think a good deal more of mutton than of physic, and as for the ground, it don't pay a percentage!" But this new comer was decidedly looking ill, in fact seemed worn out by work or anxiety, and his pale face was in decided contrast to the ruddy countenances of the Sleperton and Seaborough men and women, living between the splendid sea one way, and the odorous country the other. Dr. Hunter devoutly hoped that the distinguished stranger hadn't come for nothing; it would be some compensation to read in one of the select journals to which he, as an educated man, subscribed so regularly, and received by post direct from the office, "We regret to learn that the Rev. Westley Garland, during his visit to Seaborough for a few days' rest, has been taken suddenly ill. He is, we understand, progressing satisfactorily in the skilled hands of Dr. Hunter." It pleased the doctor, and he thought, "I'll go and look him up, see how he holds, shall tell in a minute if he is likely to be down." And he did so. He had not seen him close before, and looked with the true audacious scrutiny of the privileged medical man. He found the Minister decidedly pale, certainly careworn, emphatically harassed, but, as he put it to himself with keen disgust, "hearty as a buck!" And the doctor felt disheartened: "It is astonishing how some

of these studious men do last out; I declare they're just like leather!" Thinking which the doctor seated himself for a few minutes' sociable conversation.

"Have you heard from your son lately?" To the widow, who with graceful warmth replied, "This very morning."

"Mr. Lorry is a good judge, it is rather bleak here just now! You find this place try you after the genial air of Brighton, sir?"

"Not at all, I think it several degrees warmer!"

"Well, upon my word, I never heard that opinion before; you astonish me!"

"As a rule, sir, local men are too interested to express their candid opinions!"

"Oh, Mr. Garland!" cried the widow coquettishly, "how naughty of you to be so hard upon your sex!"

"It is quite unintentional, my dear madam, I simply report the result of commonplace observation. I imagine this to be a very healthy and salubrious part of the country!"

"Oh, yes," said the doctor glumly, "the people haven't much to complain of; yet the farmer grumbles, and the tradesman laments the badness of the times, but so I suppose they have from time immemorial; things can't be so bad since they're all engaged at testimonial-making!" This the doctor uttered as though contemning equally the object and the promoters, but with a shadow of interest, as though he would have no objection to become the bearer of any donation towards the purpose in view if the Minister might feel disposed to favour him therewith. Mr. Garland was gradually experiencing that even the rural Elysium is not exempt from its principles of greed.

"I have heard something of this," said Mrs. Vincent; "what is it all about?"

"Well, it is found necessary, for some inscrutable reason, to present Mr. Elsynge of Froggypond with a testimonial, and all well-to-do people are called upon to subscribe!"

"They have not been to me yet," replied the widow, with an air of resignation. "How is the eccentric mistress of Froggypond?"

"Thank you, the old lady continues very hearty." Dr. Hunter had been physician-in-chief to the Elsynge family for a very long time, but as neither the lady nor her grandson had ever ailed anything, the appointment was a sinecure.

"Mr. Elmore will come into considerable property there; not much need for a testimonial, I should think!"

"It appears exceedingly doubtful, madam, whether Mrs. Elsynge will make up her mind to depart this life before Mr. Elmore;" (correcting himself) "that respected lady is happily possessed of a magnificent constitution."

The doctor departed; the Major and his lady returned to the room.

"Strong smell of drugs!" taking out the enamelled snuff-box. "Odd thing, but people are sure to drop in just as one is sitting down to tea. I think I heard mention of my friend Elsynge's testimonial. This box was a testimonial, sir, presented me by the great Duke. 'Howard,' said he, 'accept it' (though I really didn't like to, knowing it to have been his constant companion), 'and think of me sometimes with esteem!' Here his eyes became dim; I lowered the colours, when he revived in an instant, grasped my hand, and murmured, 'The knowledge of your esteem and my Queen's approbation lightens this trial;' and so passed away." Mrs. Howard was heard to murmur, "Dear Duke!" in a voice of deep emotion. The Major handed the box to Mr. Garland, who justly admired, and then returned it; handsome of its kind, it had years ago been borrowed at Baden, and, in accordance with the Major's invariable policy, never returned. "Thus, you will understand," continued Major Howard, "the interest, the fraternal interest, I take in testimonials; and respecting, as I do, my old friend Elsynge, you will readily imagine I at once consented to form a branch subscription fund, and undertook the sole responsibility of the same; in order, my dear sir, to ease these heavily tried business people, whose time is so valuable, to some extent of the onerous labour. I wrote to a friend of mine in the Grenadier Guards, 'Will you subscribe to the Elmore Elsynge testimonial?' He knew us both, no need for formal representation. No answer came. 'Not a mean fellow,

I do hope!' thought I; then wrote again, 'Will you, or will you not join us? Handsome piece of plate, the Froggypond memorial!' Then came a cheque for ten guineas. I have several friends at a distance wishing to help; officially announced subscription-list open at Alderman Gubbins, so it is; I prefer to hide my little light under a bushel, and to collect privately from the circle I immediately know towards this representative object. We should all do what little we can, Mr. Garland. Mrs. Howard said it was *infra dig.*; I thought otherwise; man should trample upon his prejudices. One day at mess our adjutant brought out dice; now I hate all gambling and play, and lottery speculation is contrary to my principles, but I not only expressed no displeasure, but actually joined my subordinate in a quiet game, for the simple purpose of assisting him in a harmless recreation; an engagement was pending, and as it is half the battle to keep up the spirits of your men, he exclaimed somewhat excitedly as he shuffled the pack, 'I—'"

"Dice, Major," his lady quietly interposed, then aside to her friend, "Dear man, his memory is so bad!"

"Yes, my dear, I thank you. He was about to throw when—"

Here the Major was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Vincent's servant with a card upon a tiny salver.

"Ah! my landlord, Mr. Elmore Elsynge. Show Mr. Elsynge into the drawing-room."

"My dear," said the Major reproachfully to his lady, "we quite forgot to write those letters! We must return at once, to save the evening post."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT SLEPERTON FAIR.

Sleperton Fair was looked forward to with much eagerness, and was the one event kept up annually with great spirit. Thereto went all the swains for miles around, each with his lass; the staid folk with their children. It was a wonderful gathering, was Sleperton Fair, and great was the jollity and merriment. Thither came all the shows and roundabouts that could, anyhow, get there; waxwork exhibitions, wild beast caravans, shooting-galleries, swings, ginger-bread, toy and toffy stalls, and sweetstuff barrows; booths were erected for sparring, wrestling, quoits, and eating and drinking; upon that peaceful circle of green there met together the monstrosities and wonders native to the English fair, and a highly animated scene it was, especially at nine o'clock in the evening, when lighted up and swarming with the ruralites all agape at the marvels and scattering their money broadcast. They saved all the year for this, and then spent on principle. Three days the fair lasted, and during that time the hamlet was given over to revelry. Old English sports and new English sports ran their round with zest. Every year the site of honour was taken up by a Circus, which the proprietors by pre-arrangement so determined that two should not journey there together, and that it should be a different one each fair time. To the left of this was a show of the Richardson type; to the right, but naturally covering more ground than the theatre, was Maneater's far-famed Royal Menagerie. Near the theatre would be found the celebrated Chinese Manikins, next to which the Indian Jugglers and Serpent Charmers, and beyond

the Indians, the Court Marionettes. Mrs. Maneater (Mr. Maneater had come to an untimely end in one of his lion-taming exploits) had for a neighbour the largest Punch and Judy travelling, next to which was the Asiatic Giant, attended by the Performing Fleas, the Hairless Horse, and the entrancing Circassian Beauty. As the outside music of each show was in rivalry the din and clangour can be imagined. Sleperton Fair, indeed, made as much noise as it is possible for a fair to make, and if noise attracts people, as it seems to do, it was perfectly successful here. The trombones, saxhorns, euphonia, gongs, drums, cymbals, tambourines, and other instruments, went at it as though after this fair, their opportunity for arousing a disturbance would be for ever gone. At the top of the steps, beside the gilded dragon portals giving ingress to her unrivalled exhibition, sat the redoubtable Mrs. Maneater beating a drum and proclaiming with all the strength of her voice that the animals were just going to be fed; a process well known to work upon the public interest and cunningly extended by feeding one animal at a time, which agreeable office fell to the lot of a brawny individual specially retained to groom the denizens of the desert. Mrs. Maneater was a lady of florid belongings; all her life long she had been connected with, and was as fond of, her savage tribe as though she were their mother; of easy-going temper and kind heart, the well-to-do widow of the lion-tamer was a general favourite and upon good terms with the several branches of the exhibiting profession. Time after time she had phalanxed her vans beside the various travelling circuses, she knew all the proprietors and the members of the companies: if she arrived first and had camped, she would lend the brawny one to help the others to peg and build; if she arrived last, she received as readily many a lift from the strong-handed of the tent, who shunted her caravans and formed a caged quadrangle in no time. Mrs. Maneater sat at her drum, a tin treasury by her side, into which she poured the handfuls of sixpences from her apron while the crowd flocked in. There was no professor to discourse Natural History in exquisite English, Mrs. Maneater scorned such adventitious aids to popularity; she could neither

read nor write, and did not agree with making her patrons wise: "Give it 'em in the rough" said Mrs. Maneater, "but give 'em the real thing; there's no deception about Maneater's, they can see for themselves and explain to one another;" and her patrons did so, upon a system that might have astonished Buffon. Never once did Mrs. Maneater cast an envious eye upon the throng streaming into Ringdom and Tanner's amphitheatre, apparently swallowing up so many sight-seers. She knew they would come to her sooner or later, knew the rural taste for the marvellous to be insatiable, and where, thought the old lady with pride, would they look upon an exhibition containing more marvels than her world-famed menagerie! The performances in the Circus were not lengthy at fair time, some twenty minutes or thereabouts, when *God save the Queen* played the ruddy audience out, to make room for another crowded circle of approving spectators.

It was the first night of the fair, a clear fine night, when the gala seemed almost robbed of its offensiveness by the calm serene sky above, moonlit and starry; everybody was there, even the young farmers' sons and many visitors from Seaborough also, and it was a tempting night to walk about and see what was going on. Seen from the road leading straight from Old Seaborough it presented a haze of light, and twinkle of lamps; the braying of trumpets could be heard, and the hum of the business doing. Getting nearer, the clash of the instruments, the cluttering of drums, and blasts of the trumpets came out shrill upon the ear. All round the Green the cottagers kept open house and welcomed their friends who had come to see the fair; little children sent up to bed to get them out of the way stood with their faces pressed to the diamond-panes of the small windows and watched wistfully, as such do, until their toes were cramped and they looked through a breath-bedewed tracery at the distant cluster of lights.

'Walter' had not betrayed the emotion she experienced upon finding they were bound for Sleperton, connected with which were her happiest reflections. If she could but contrive to inform Lorry of her being so near him, and again in such hated thraldom, she felt sure he would do something to help

her. But he might not be at home, and she was so sharply looked after now, truly there seemed insurmountable difficulty in the way. And then the time was so short, they would be off again directly for quite another part of England. She cast yearning glances toward that grand old house, endeared by the knowledge of her parentage, and to that pretty cottage-home of her loved boy friend. Little she imagined when thinking of that bright and beauteous girl who had broken upon her memory like a glimpse of sunshine, that the sister, as she loved to think of her, was at that moment in the cottage towards which she looked so wistfully. Little (and this was more strange than all) did she think that in yonder stately dwelling house her mother sat with blinds and curtains drawn to veil the low display from her fastidious, much disgusted vision. How well she remembered her toiling progress along the village street that evening when first she came to Sleperton, the kind old man who had addressed her while she watched the lessening glow of the sunset upon the houses, where she had first been told of the old place.

With vindictive satisfaction Messrs. Ringdom and Tanner had compelled her to go through all the old graceful acts that had so often brought down thunders of applause. Whether it was the contrast of the pretty child with her steed, or the natural beauty she possessed, or the elegance of her movements, or that almost defiant and desperate daring, lending *esprit* to her performance, certain it is she had from the first been a great favourite. No longer was she disguised in boy's apparel, the proprietors altered that very quickly; it was in the light and attractive garb of the child of the arena; a low muslin dress, crisp skirts that fluttered round her, and a scarf floating to the gentle current while the horse pranced the circle: although so simply adorned, a piece of velvet round the throat, and a small cluster of flowers upon the bosom, eager eyes followed her, so interesting was the picture. At night between the performances she was required to appear on the stage erected in front of the establishment, and divided midway to give admission to the spectators passing into the Circus; upon one side this child with other members of the company

danced; upon the other, the buffoons, acrobats, and that india-rubber genius, Boneless Joey of Japan, disported themselves in various antics vastly attractive to the rustic crowd outside.

Mixing with the crowd freely as though one of them, after his usual manner, Mr. Garland was arrested before the Circus by the sight of that child dancing for the coarse enjoyment of those assembled, and it was such a sad and at the same time such a beautiful spectacle that he was absorbed by it and lost in thought. Gradually it dawned upon him—that resemblance to Lena, to the dainty face upon the canvas. He had not heard all the story known to us, but he was sure the child before him was the original of the painting and he made up his mind to see and question her. It would be a task of difficulty no doubt, but Westley Garland was wise in his generation and resorted to diplomacy. After the crowd had scattered, and many from far-off hamlets had set out homewards in companies along the dark road, enlivening the way with roystering song; after the lights in the tented building were extinguished—save where grooms with lanterns attended to the provender of the animals; after the members of the company were gone to their respective lodgings and taverns, and Jimmy Ringdom, Esq., with Mrs. Ringdom—greatly fatigued by the exertion consequent upon money-taking at the pigeon-hole pay-box on the stage, and the co-proprietor Billy Tanner, Esq., with Mrs. Tanner—much wearied and very thirsty after energetic trick acts with the highly trained steed Pegasus, had resorted to the *Lindon Arms;* after the flaring oil lamps, and torches scattered throughout the fair were all darkened, save only a glimmer here and there where some of the dusk skinned stowed away the remainder such as ginger-bread, jewellery, nuts, toys, ornaments, china and glass, cheap prints, fruit, and other things, while a thick haze hovered above the place and unwholesome scents struggled with the sweet air; then the Minister moved silently among the stalls, and threaded his way around the booths, passed behind the shows, and skirted the big tent of horsemanship, arriving at the point of his destination, which was the famous Maneater's, just as the brawny helper was hanging tarpaulin over the gilt and glass

splendour portalling the entrance. Just within, the formidable but not unkindly looking mistress was counting her receipts. The stranger waited until she had finished, not to put her out in her calculation, neither did she desist because he was there waiting, but when all was balanced and tied with string in little canvas bags she said brusquely without looking up, "Well, my man, what do you want?" To which the man with civil respect replied, "Small coin in exchange for sovereigns or notes!" and the mother of lions and leopards was glad; it was one of the difficulties she laboured under, converting small change into large in rural districts, it being impossible for the one hostelry of importance to accommodate all the public entertainers, and the nearest town often being too far off to admit of a purpose journey; thus the mother of lions and leopards was glad; and the transaction was conducted to their mutual satisfaction. Then the obliging stranger requested permission to see a few of the animals on the quiet, and Mrs. Maneater, who was pardonably proud of the condition of her menagerie, herself conducted him down the steps into the enclosed well-trodden area, with its barred walls and the curious odour inseparable from a collection of wild beasts. The mistress held a stable lantern aloft with a muscular arm, and a clenched fist that would have laid any of those crouching, fiercely peering ones, low at her feet, were there any necessity; but as a rule, they gave little trouble, she said, and, with exception of that occasion when the bold Maneater was partaken of, had caused no sorrow. It was a weird scene by that one light, showing the Minister the shadowy inmates of the caravans; a ludicrous scene at times, as for instance when standing before the lions she explained, "There used to be a Dan'el, but I can't abide trickery, an' it made it too like the Wax-work affair! I'se allus dealt fair with the public, and they's dealt fair with me; I never labelled Porkepine as Armadilley, nor painted Giraffs and Helefants on the outside when the show wouldn't hold 'em; and I never had a bad sixpence offered me since travelling, many a thin 'un but never a bad 'un, and that I calls dealing fair wi' one another."

"Most certainly, Mrs. Maneater," said the Minister, with cordial approval. Then, "By the way what becomes of the

female portion of the Circus people after business?" She looked up with quick suspicion; such is aroused by a slight remark, where as in this instance the daily life is a running tilt with insult, the nightly experience one incessant scene of vice. The Minister immediately unbuttoned his coat and the badge of his calling, the square-cut vest and white neck-cloth reassured the woman.

"I feel I can deal honestly with you, Mrs. Maneater, because you are an honest woman; I have an interest in a young girl, the youngest there!"

"So have I! Allus have done!" said the woman with refreshing renewed candour. The voice of this man talking with her, so sadly tender, his kind face so lined with trouble, were inviting to confidence, and she even added, "I've allus thought her out o' place there, not but what they're nice people enough, but somehow she seems different to the usual girls!" The remark was the more strange, since it is an uncommon thing for one of these travelling exhibitors to volunteer any opinion upon their neighbours. "I've watched her for long," continued Mrs. Maneater, "and a'most with affection, though I says it, an' when some weeks ago she ran away from 'em, I felt a kinder glad of it, for many's the time she's said to me she wished she could run away, or else lay down an' die! Now to a young gal feeling that ways it's a hard life, it is! But I've shown her what little kindness I could, and allus will when it happens we are pitched one agen another!"

"And very good of you, ma'am; you will receive your reward for every kind word and deed; I half suspected it, that's why I came to you to-night."

The woman courtesied; she was of rough manners, but her deference and gratitude for his confidence, were in themselves graceful. "I thanks you, sir, for your good opinion; I've allus done my duty by all, and never showed a bird or a beast till paid for! Mr. Cross, o' Liverpool, knows us and will tell you we're honest folk."

"I'm sure of it. Where can I see and speak with the girl now?"

"Here; I'll bring her to you; she trusts me, and knows I wouldn't lead her wrong!"

"Poor child, to need such caution!" The woman shrugged her shoulders and went up the steps with heavy tread, leaving the lantern on the topmost; its dim light making the place look ghastly; the growling of the animals, and measured pacing of those disturbed lent additional gloom; low down between the bars fierce eyes glared upon the intruder; without were the signs of unrest indicative of a camp of wanderers. The friendly woman returned shortly in company with the girl. Mr. Garland took the little hand so kindly, and asked her,—

"I think you are the young lady my friend Lord Ellerby entertained, in company with another?"

"Yes, sir," trembling with joy, "I was searching for her when I was seen and brought back to the Circus, from which I had escaped."

"I supposed so. Very well, now you want me to help you?"

In reply the child asked "Do you know to whom the Manor House here belonged?"

"To Lord Lindon!"

"Yes; I am his daughter!" She said quietly, and with dignity. "Such is my birth, it is quite true; and fatherless, motherless, I have been, and am, the common drudge of a common Circus!"

"This is very sad. Thank God, it is in my power to alter it; fear not, your troubles are well-nigh over; keep your own counsel, and hope on a little longer. I know well how you have suffered, take comfort in my assurance that your suffering is almost at an end. I must see these people you are with. I doubt not there will be some difficulty in persuading or compelling them to cancel the agreement binding you to them, but do not fear, it shall be done, and you will be restored to your mother!"

"To my mother!" repeated the child with rapt and awe-struck interest and eagerness.

"To your mother, but have patience; I am obliged to take a journey to the north to-morrow, to keep an important engagement made with one of whom you will know more, but I shall not lose sight of your interests and speedily return."

She fell upon her knees before him, and, clasping his hand, kissed it repeatedly, while the grateful tears fell quickly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

QUALIFYING FOR THE BAR.

Between Trinity and Michaelmas Terms, William Arden had certainly enjoyed an easy time of it; in a pleasant saunter here and there, and yachting off the coast, during which delightful occupation befell that romantic adventure which gained him access to the Boarded House; and from that time he experienced a change in his lazy quest of pleasure, and more profitable seasons of study, to which he returned bearing with him an exceedingly tender recollection of one dainty little face, which somehow he always thought of in connexion with fallen fruit upon the grass. The twenty-four November days of the term were devoted to assiduous study; there seemed something more in the world than there had been, and Willie bestowed, perhaps, more serious thought than ever before upon the future. He was well provided for, had a hopeful prospect before him, was naturally of a very affectionate disposition, held tenaciously to strong principles of honour, possessed innate refinement, and felt highly elated, as he said to himself one morning, while flourishing a razor before his glass with much self-complacency at the comeliness of his visage, "and I think I shall make a girl as good a husband as most fellows!" While exposing this pardonable piece of self-complacency, and corroborating the opinion thus arrived at, we must acknowledge also that against these were points not so prepossessing, and of which young ladies think much; thus Mr. Arden was in no sense a brilliant person, but as the essentially brilliant persons are seldom very amiable, and are almost always eaten up by vanity, this may not count to his prejudice;

next he was not a wit, another drawback, ladies are choice as to the water of their diamonds, worn with so great a measure of pride; but if not a wit he was exceedingly thoughtful, which with some few rare spirits more than atones for the absence of the distinguished trait. The Term closed, and Willie visited relatives in town, returning home in December, when Yorkshire, to say the least of it, presents a forcible contrast to London. There were five good weeks before the commencement of Hilary, and all Willie could think of was living those five weeks through with the hope of seeing his fair querist, whose thirst for knowledge, or rather enlightenment, had so posed this gentleman qualifying for the Bar.

Naturally his first question upon sitting quietly down to talk the news over, was of his father's friend and daughter. He was concerned to see the old pastor look troubled at the inquiry, and guessed instantly that something was amiss; and Mr. Arden told his son of Lena's going away, to Willie's intense disgust and annoyance; and of Mr. St. Aubyn's poignant distress of mind in consequence, also of the girl's return, of St. Aubyn's refusal to receive her, and of her going away with a Mrs. Vincent, who had been staying at the House. And Master Willie was surprised, as well he might be, and condemned St. Aubyn's harshness, as he called it, in no measured terms.

"This will be a sudden change for Lena; I hope the lady she is with will prove a really kind friend."

"St. Aubyn speaks highly of her!"

"He spoke highly of the other woman, yet would have been better without her valuable services."

"I never liked her!"

"Nor I; she led me a pretty chase, or would have done; where does this Mrs. Vincent live?"

"At Sleperton, near Seaborough!"

"You have a picture of the Manor. I have a very good mind to take a trip to Sleperton and try to see her, she may be unhappy, possibly feel glad to see me." The old pastor secretly favoured the scheme, thinking it might in some circuitous manner bring about a reconciliation, but aware of St. Aubyn's

dislike to intrusion of any sort in his private affairs, he forebore to countenance it by assent or advice.

Willie Arden walked down to the village, to a grey stone cottage, where his face was welcome as the sunshine, where an honest fisherman and his good wife, provided for and admitted to the close friendship of this grateful scholar, were longing for the coming of their generous helper. The children saw him first, coming down the village street, and ran in to mother with glad speed with the tidings that Mr. Willie was in sight. And he entered with his cheeriest word, and the laughter never altogether absent in his gravest moods. Enlivening them instantly, as such a visitor will, shaking hands warmly, and sitting down with that happy freedom which was one of the qualities endearing him to them and others.

"Well, old friend, how fares it with you?"

"Comfortably, Mr. William, thanks to you, sir. Without your help we'd found it hard, I reckon, getting through the winter!"

"We were both of us near to seeing no winter at all, Brown; but I hope you have looked to the new yacht?"

"She's in good trim, Mr. William, and will be ready for your summer cruise, sir."

"A handsomer craft than the last, but I liked the old one best, Brown!"

"So did I, sir; never shall get used to this one so pleasantly!"

"We shall see; I've set my mind upon a Mediterranean trip this summer, and you shall accompany me."

"I thank ye, sir!" and the old fisherman touched his forehead respectfully, while his face brightened with the anticipation. He loved the water, had been on it from boyhood; even the sharp lesson of its fury failed to decrease that fondness for its shifting humours. When it had come so near to losing life thereby, no bitterness was in the faithful heart, but a readiness to accept from the elements he had served all his life, rough treatment, and, if need be, a cruel death, and when one came without the other Brown bore no ill-will—as these constant fellows on the coast seldom do—but was first to the

great heaving billows with the net to help poor comrades, who were not provided for like himself.

From there Willie Arden walked on to another of his father's people, who loved both father and son with the strong affection of these northern natures; to the fisher folk, and the tillers of the soil, and the workers upon the old brown coal called jet. And these constituted the larger portion of the little flock. Often in boyhood had Willie stood watching the rapidly-revolving buffers polishing the pieces from which the scar on the surface had been first removed, level cut pieces, polished by lamp-black upon those soft leather buffers, watching the process with the interest of boyhood, which stands absorbed before everything significant of activity, from the blacksmith's forge to the shuttle. He went amongst these humble affectionate folk, as was his custom when at home, and then having made the round, giving a look-in at most, he returned to dinner, with this piece of intimation tendered with dutiful respect. "If you don't mind, father, I purpose, as I said, running down to Sleperton; it's a long way, but I shall enjoy the ride."

"As you please, my boy! I am sure you will act for the best!"

With what a happy smile he inclined his head. Perfect confidence, love, honour, and respect, rendered the mutual love of these two a type of the beautiful sentiment it should be.

And next day Willie Arden journeyed to Sleperton, with which locality he would have been lightly impressed, had it not been for the fact of the annual fair, just at that time being celebrated, having presented a scene of excitement and business which pleased him as fully as it would have done a great boy home from school. As, however, there was attraction greater even than the fair in close proximity to that pretty Green, he could only make for the Cottage; and he stood before it, upon the edge of the grass with the roadway between, and behind him the straggling booths, with the great tent of a Circus in the centre. He stood looking at the picturesque dwelling, just such a bower as he would have liked to spend the greater part of his days in with—with—her.

Then glancing at the window, where she usually sat, he saw her, lovely as ever, a degree more thoughtful looking, but none the worse for that. She did not at first see him, he stood there, however, until she did, and when in time her glance fell upon the hero of that early dream, she could scarcely believe her eyes: the next moment with a little joyful cry, she arose hurriedly, ran past the surprised Martha Saxe, downstairs almost at a bound, brushing the dress of the elegant widow coming forth to ascertain the cause of the commotion, out through the porch and along the garden path, across the road, and, regardless of the look of it, threw her arms about the friend from home; then mindful all at once of her good resolutions, stood blushing and embarrassed, yet contriving to stammer forth, "I am so glad to see you, you've come for me, I know!" Willie, who had been taken by storm, and who thought that at all events his sweetheart had not mended her manners, was troubled to know what to answer, and said, "Yes, I've come for you; are you ready to go back?"

To which the wild one in an ecstasy of delight replied, "I should think I am; just wait till I've got my hat, never mind the other things, and if Martha won't come she may stop!"

"Not at all," said prudent Willie, gentleman ever; "if Martha does not come I can't take you; but how about your friend Mrs. Vincent?"

"Well, I shall not take any notice of her; she's fond of serving me like that, now it will be my turn!"

All was so sudden Mr. Arden was quite unprepared; her eagerness was more than he had bargained for, if not more than he had hoped, but even thus overtaken his natural delicacy led him to express his wish for the attendance of her maid.

Lena on her part, all excitement and impulse, overjoyed by the sight of this friend, whom she felt she could trust implicitly, never thought of that powerful mediator the Minister, even then absent in her interests, and who with his calm influence might do so much more for her than could this younger man, already regarded with suspicion.

Hurrying back again, Lena was confronted by the amazed and indignant mistress of the house, with "So, young lady, this will be pretty conduct to be communicated to your guardian!"

Without deigning to answer her, Lena hastened to her chamber and locked the door, scaring her faithful attendant by instructions to put together such few necessary things as would be required, for they were going home with Willie Arden, who had come expressly! Mrs. Saxe knew her too well to remonstrate, and obeyed with the silent service characteristic of the woman.

When her preparations were completed, the strong-minded young lady marched downstairs followed by her servant, the astounded widow falling back a pace at the foot, while demanding an explanation. Lena ignored the lady and her request together, walking on with determination; and joining Mr. Arden, they went their way without more ado, Mrs. Saxe with a civil obeisance to the widow.

Past the old Manor House, where the blinds of all front windows were drawn close; past the central tent of the fair, the applause of the spectators echoing as they walked on, to the graceful performance of a lovely girl who had never shown such zest and spirit, never looked half so beautiful.

With a slightly heightened colour Mrs. Vincent penned these few lines to St. Aubyn:—

In spite of all my care, Lena eloped with some fast-looking young man this afternoon at 5.30. *You will remember my opinion from the portrait, uttered with regret but in sincerity —to-day's event confirms my prophecy.*

Then she murmured, "Well, I do think this ought to settle it."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN EMBARRASSING MISSION.

A DOUBLE errand took Mr. Garland to the North. His time was very valuable, he had little to spare, still he earnestly desired to see what could be done for two persons in whom he experienced profound interest in two very different quarters. Miss St. Aubyn and Sir Dickson Cheffinger were thus again, indirectly, in juxtaposition. And first he would go to Yorkshire, to the House upon the Cliff, there seek audience of the recluse, and plead for the lonely child he was befriending. While contemplating this he little imagined the surprise in store for him.

The Minister stood before the great gate awaiting admission, he had sent in his card by Williams notwithstanding the man's repeated assurance that his master would not see any visitors. And the man had gone on his mission dubiously, with the message that a clergyman wished for a few minutes' audience. He returned with the master's compliments and a peremptory refusal to see the gentleman. Then Mr. Garland adopted this method, he sent word that he had recently had an interview with Miss St. Aubyn. Mr. St. Aubyn knew that already, and hated him like poison for it; the widow's letters had certainly caused the recluse to detest this particular man rather more than his race generally: he returned this answer: "The Rev. Mr. Garland may remain at the gate till a cathedral is built over him before he shall enter here!" The Rev. Mr. Garland with a gentle smile that won the heart of Williams entirely, returned answer courteously and firmly that his errand would not permit of his going until

he had seen Mr. St. Aubyn, and he would patiently await his convenience. This struck the master as a mild sort of reply to his surly message, and he bade Williams return to the kitchen and not trouble any more about it. Westley Garland had been born too near a wood to be terrified by the hooting of owls, and sat him down on the rock, by the gate, very much admiring the little ferns growing thereabout, and the fair scene outspread beyond, and not in the least disturbed. In his pocket he had a gem edition of the Archbishop of Cambray's *Telemachus*, and he was deep in the old delight when he heard a step on the pavement of the court; the master, unable to quiet a feeling of uneasiness, had come to peep at the Minister, who was the latest person of note in that world from whence *he* had fled. But when he recognized, in the man reclining at ease and reading, the friend of long ago, his wonder was extreme. Unbarring the gate instantly, he hastened out to him, and the surprise of the one as they greeted each other, was not deeper upon discovering in the famous preacher the friend he so much esteemed as Lionel Travers, than was that of the other in finding that the recluse was Lord Lindon, whose history had, of late, occupied so much of the Minister's thoughts. They went indoors, and in the quiet privacy of St. Aubyn's choice retreat favoured each other with explanations; there was much to hear, much to be told, and the gentlemen were talking a long time, so long that the daylight faded, and the room grew dusk before the Minister approached the special theme of his visit; at last he said, "Now I must refer to your own recent and more delicate affairs; I was with your Lena yesterday!" and the other became gloomy instantly.

"I would so much rather not hear anything upon that painful subject; I am curing myself, I hope, of my weakness, but shall never do so while dwelling on the memory; the wound is very tender yet, I assure you."

"I know it, but before leaving you I hope to do something towards healing that wound!"

"I have heard," said the other, with a courteous smile. "you are the chevalier of distressed humanity!"

"Depend upon it, my lord, I find very many wounded in the world, in one way or another!"

"But do you not think some wounds heal quicker for being left alone?"

"Undoubtedly; this is one of them; after to-day."

"Before I hear anything you have to say, and which I would listen to from no other person in the world—pardon me if I speak first—you will then judge better of the advisability of entering further into the discussion."

"By all means!"

"You are aware of the wretched termination to my married life, aware of my purpose when first taking and training this pretty piece of treachery, aware of the awful blow it was to me when I returned here to find—to find—no matter: now my friend, would you deem it charity to revive a man's liking for the snake that had stung him and would sting him again upon the earliest opportunity? It would be more merciful to leave his affections to grow cool as philosophy, and calm as science, when dispassionately, from a safe distance, the manners and instincts of reptiles may be studied without injury! I need hardly say so, but much I wonder whether, if I paid a flying visit to the world, I should find one woman quietly at home with her needle-work, faithful to her husband, living for her children, mindful of her God?"

Mr. Garland, ever the champion of the sex censured, would, at any other time, have expressed himself warmly in its defence, but his solicitude dwelt upon particular members thereof too deeply to endanger their cause by losing time over argument. "We will leave that. I plead now for one whose sin has been very great, yet whose pitiful yearning for forgiveness, and union with her children, has moved me to intrude upon you."

The manner, gentle, considerate, full of feeling, even more than the words, prepared the suffering nobleman for confirmation of a horrible suspicion gradually dawning upon him. And he could almost catch from the other's trembling utterance how the disclosure pained him who had thus accepted the unpleasant office of revealing the singularly sad connexion.

"My plainness will be very painful to you," continued the mediator, "but it is not more cruel than prolonging an announcement which wounds while it may heal! Some of the ties in life are so underlaid with solemn design, we poor human beings can only stand by, wondering and questioning; the powers of good and the powers of evil are so inextricably interwoven. the Lena you have loved and have discarded is the child of Lady Lindon."

Lord Lindon arose from his chair; it was very dark, and the anguish upon the face could not be seen by the other, but he guessed it, and was moved to intense sympathy. It had been an embarrassing revelation, but Mr. Garland felt it would be false pity to prolong it. For a few minutes the agony of it caused bewilderment, then, gradually, all asserted its order, and the incidents of the past and of the present came out wonderfully vivid.

"And I have been harbouring the child of that infamy and trouble! Nay, but it increases the horror of this time!"

"Only for a season, be brave, look it in the face, think how the child has loved you, and still loves you!"

"While my own girl has been the devil knows where! I thank you, sir, but if this is how things are going on in the world of which you entertain such hope, I don't admire their order! It strikes me no one could have wished myself a more diabolic sequence!"

"You will pass through this gloomy stage and come forth calm, prepared to meet and to forgive your wife; she but asks for this; you will not deny her one meeting for the purpose of making the remainder of her life more happy!"

"It would be an interview of exceeding pain to both, and, as I think, a useless ordeal. It is almost too much to expect of one who has suffered as I have done."

"I am conscious of the magnanimity required, the courage, ay, and of the Christian spirit; but I have hope of you, knowing the fine nature to which I plead!"

"Which would lead you to presume! Have some regard for that fineness of feeling you accredit me with. An interview with Lady Lindon is simply impossible, unless some great

revolution of feeling gives me more strength and calmness than I now possess."

"I have no fear; the noble bravery inherited of a noble line both chivalrous and good will come to your aid. Could I tell you how that lonely lady, aloof in her inexorable pride from all human sympathy and fellowship, from all divine consolation, how she lives upon the hardly defined, the scarcely expected hope of this, it would move you to, at least, assure her you forgive the past—"

"But I don't, my good sir!" interrupted his lordship irately, for this perseverance taxed him almost beyond endurance. The other knew it, but thought more of those for whom he was pleading, and he said with great emotion, "I plead for no common penitence, and for a heart so difficult to deal with it would break with longing for this before ever it advanced a step to seek it. Lady Lindon—forgive me—presented to my first view every objectionable feature ever possessed by woman; but I have learnt to know her better."

"Yes," replied his lordship, with saturnine, moody bitterness, "your position is a tolerably safe one; but I wonder the view you would take in my place. An old writer said man could swallow anything, give him the time; but if I digest the morsel you have been good enough to bring, I must be either more than human, or aided by a Higher power."

"Such will be forthcoming when you are prepared to receive it. Meanwhile I entreat you will first, as of supreme importance, deliberate upon a meeting with Lady Lindon."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHEFFINGER *v.* CHEFFINGER.

Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger's tenure of Cheffinger, although of lengthened period, and of apparent security, was, after all, one of hazard and uncertainty, so long as that half-witted cousin in the distance was at large. Poor Cousin Dickson would never do anything of himself, for he was wretchedly low in the social status, and Sir Claude took care to keep him so; yet there was no telling, but that absurd crotchet of Dickson's, in regard to titled folk, and folk without title, to whom he granted dignities as required, might lead to this awkward and uncertain cousin some day finding a friend who would make Dickson's representation a matter of close investigation; and Sir Claude knew well his claim to the Abbey, once opened to question, could not be sustained, so far as he was concerned. It was a grisly piece of realism that, shirk it how he might, stared him in the face, and gave him but little rest. He might be steered clear of, for the remaining years of his life, now that so many had passed on undisturbed; but it was equally as possible at any time somebody might run down to Cheffinger upon unpleasant business. Sir Claude endeavoured to ignore the ugly probability, filled his house with a merry company from year's end to year's end, favoured sport, patronized art, simulated science, affected literature, was much liked, counted an open-hearted English gentleman, and was so; cheaply!

Great were the festivities at the Abbey; not now and then, but all the year round. In-doors and out a continuous round of pastime and pleasure; but it did not relieve its owner of

the dark shadow looming over every scheme for the enjoyment of life. Sir Claude disliked being alone, and as a matter of fact was seldom alone; he indulged his passion for the chase to the utmost, and found it a tolerably fair antidote to gloom. Varied was the sport, when from August a large party of his town and country friends assembled at CHEFFINGER, and either in the neighbourhood or at a distance gave themselves up to the delights of the autumn: blackcock, grouse, bustard, moor-game, black game, partridge, and quail, then off and on for a month, buck and red deer. In October they commenced pheasant shooting, the great preserves on distant confines of the estate resounded with the firing of the sportsmen. Hind and fox-hunting varied the sport, while some sniggled for eels. With November the pursuit changed for woodcocks, and as the year drew towards its close the shooting of these became more exciting. In December, the Abbey revived the old customs and good cheer that once gave this land the style of Merry England. Sir Claude's argument was an eminently politic one. Said he, "In case I ever have to give it up, I will enjoy it now I've got it!" He did so; as much as a man could with the sword of Damocles suspended above him; really, however, these swords are plentiful as Sheffield blades, and the men and women above whom they are hanging contrive, notwithstanding, to jog on pretty comfortably. Sir Claude did so at all events, until one morning a strange conveyance startled the deer, and sent them herding beneath the trees at a far-off corner of the park, where there was no road, and silence reigned magnificent as in the Highlands. Sir Claude always had one eye on the alert for any unknown and peculiar-looking personage; the individual thus arriving without invitation was not a pleasant-looking gentleman, and the proprietor of Cheffinger Abbey experienced that cold thrill which people of his warmly hospitable temperament particularly dislike. The stranger's card was handed to Sir Claude; it bore the name of *Coke O'Connor;* and Sir Claude gave orders that the gentleman should be shown to the library. The name afforded no indication of his business; Sir Claude had an unpleasant twitter of the eyes when

uneasy, and in walking to the library his eyes twittered like those of a dormouse when it wakes, after a long sleep, to find itself under the guardianship of a cat.

Mr. O'Connor's appearance did not tend to reassure the owner of the Abbey, who bowed distantly, his eyes still twittering before the dagger-like point of the dark man's imperial.

"I have the honour," said the dark man, "to speak to Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger?"

"The same, sir!"

"I have run down from town to see you upon a little matter of business connected with the estate—you will permit me to introduce myself as a member of the firm of *Barnard and O'Connor, Cursitor Street?*—my respected partner is so much engaged or he would have waited upon you himself."

"Will you take a chair, sir?" said the owner of CHEFFINGER with affability.

The gentleman from Cursitor Street took a chair, and sat thereon with profound legislative impudence, drawing his closed hand carefully down his imperial as if feeling for the commencement of his brief.

"Our firm has lately had the disputed CHEFFINGER question before it; a person known as Dickson Cheffinger claiming to be the rightful heir, and ascertained to be in some remote relation connected with yourself, is about to lay his petition before her Majesty."

"Who of course is well aware, sir, that in every Body Corporate of her subjects there are two thirds impostors!"

"Of course," assented the other drily; "but there is the scandal all the same, only to be avoided by good management."

Sir Claude fidgeted restively, and then said,—

"Pardon me—can I offer you a glass of wine?"

"No, I thank you—during professional hours I never take it."

"Ah, just so; er—I was going to say I fancy I've heard of this fellow, Dickson Cheffinger—not sure it's the same, but doesn't he labour under some curious hallucination, fancying himself and others all sorts of things; he's a lunatic, or something in that way, at all events not quite bright? I'm not

sure, but it strikes me I've heard my people talk of some such being."

"It is evidently the same, Sir Claude, he's very curious; Mr. Barnard observed to me in confidence that it was a pity such people should be permitted to go about, disturbing old county families, and making a would-be hash of all Conservative interests, there ought to be some restraining influence upon such people!"

"And so there ought, sir, what are the madhouses for, I should like to know? Good conscience, but Society is coming to a pretty pass if landowners are to be bearded by every demented pauper with the requisite audacity! I won't encourage it, sir; I never will encourage it; my friends are all men of large landed importance and in their interests—in their interests, sir,—I discountenance all such violations of hereditary privilege; and to mark my sincerity, as a first step in a crusade against fraud, I am content to place in the hands of any respectable firm of solicitors five hundred pounds towards suppressing this vagabond, and I will pay to the said firm as many thousands to encourage, and support the ancient prerogative of justice—when this latest barefaced impostor is placed in some madhouse, where he can indulge his fancy at his leisure without injury to his fellow-creatures who are sane. It shows a shocking state of things in an enlightened country like this, Mr. O'Connor!"

"Oh, very, very! My friend Mr. Barnard was only saying yesterday, it really seems as though things were growing worse and worse! Reflective observers view such mendacious impostors with painful apprehension, Sir Claude. I am sure I am justified in the name of the firm I represent, in accepting your proposed noble contribution towards the preservation of honour and the support of the institutions of the High Court of Justice."

"Well, you have heard my proposition and can act as you think advisable; of course to a certain extent I am actuated by interested motives, because any family disputes are attended with serious inconvenience, property is impoverished, and seldom any satisfactory end gained. I mention this because,

while wishing to benefit others situated in a similar position, I have a decided reluctance to become the peg upon which an old worn-out suit of litigation is to be hung!"

"I apprehend your meaning, Sir Claude, and beg to assure you the transaction shall be conducted with strict privacy!"

"Yes—thank you. And as a guarantee of my good faith and the interest I take in the matter, permit me to hand you the little preliminary advance mentioned."

This settled it; and the Cursitor Street gentleman withdrew in a business-like and perfectly respectful manner. Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger of CHEFFINGER rejoined his guests, breathing more freely than he had done for a long time past. He perfectly understood the type of legal gentleman that had waited upon him; and Sir Claude was quite of opinion that next to an unprincipled doctor, an unprincipled lawyer is the most dangerous being on earth; although he may be made a valuable auxiliary in the carrying out of villainy. Altogether, Sir Claude considered it an advantageous move in his tactics of possession, and thus thought until one day another visitor appeared in the person of a clergyman, a man of exquisite address whom it was impossible to be offended with, coming moreover, with an introduction from one of Sir Claude's especial favourites, Frank, Lord Ellerby.

The clergyman, well known in the literary world, whose name was held in esteem by all classes, explained that he was travelling that way, much wishing to see the old paintings of which his friend, Lord Ellerby, had spoken with rapturous enthusiasm, loving moreover all these ancient dwelling-places, and so ventured to take advantage of the introduction and trespass upon Sir Claude's kindness. Sir Claude, who, as he said, had always room for another, and thought "the more the merrier," extended the hospitality for which he was noted, with a bluff grace which put the Minister instantly at ease, although it pricked his conscience, seeing that he was there more particularly in his friend Dickson's interests; but thinking the end justified the means the Minister made careful and appreciative scrutiny of Cheffinger Abbey. Sir Claude with jovial bonhomie said, "I give

my guests the run of the place, Mr. Garland; pray make yourself at home as much as the rest." The Minister accepted the run, but it was a slightly different run to that usual with the Abbey guests. Securing the company of an old servant his discriminating insight had discovered amongst the retainers, he attached the garrulous old man to his expedition in apparent quest of out-of-the-way old paintings, carving, antique metal work, rare binding, tomes deep in dust, quaint chests full of parchments and deeds whereon writing was well-nigh illegible, and other treasures, dear to the antiquary; and his companion and guide was in his element also, since he could gossip discursively until he was tired; it was a novel pleasure to the old man, they would not listen to his idle chatter down below, but left him to himself while they talked sport and slang, stable and kitchen classics. And all the time Sir Claude was with the guests, enjoying the chase with renewed ardour, the clergyman and his guide were deep in the Abbey heirlooms, and sat down to rest awhile on a great worm-eaten chest; the process of resting did not stem the flow of information; this old man was full to the soul of olden records and events of interest, connected with the home-life of the Cheffingers for generations past. It was naturally with the last owner he was most intimately acquainted, and of that singular old man he had much to say. He told of distant coldness in his treatment of this Claude Cheffinger, whom he seemed to regard with morbid suspicion, and upon one occasion openly declared his Will was made in favour of a poor relative, Claude's senior, and who would become his heir, if only for never troubling him once in his life! Here the Minister listened eagerly, and asked the name of this unoffending member of the family.

"His name was Dickson Cheffinger," replied the old man, "and I know the Will was made in his favour, for I was one of the witnesses."

"And this Dickson Cheffinger, then, is the rightful heir to the estates?"

"Hush!" said the old man cautiously, "if Sir Claude knew I prattled of this, he would discharge me, and I wouldn't like

to leave the Abbey now. Yes, had that Will been forthcoming, Sir Dickson's claim would have been established, but it wasn't, and Sir Claude entered upon possession, by the dying wish, it was said, of my old master! Sir Dickson, as I understood, spent all his means, at that time, upon asserting his rights, but his means were small and went but little way, and Sir Claude remained the undisturbed possessor. I did hear that it preyed upon the other's mind sadly, and it is an unjust thing, for the Lord be with the right, say I!"

"He always is, my friend; but He knows it is good for the worthy to be awhile in obscurity, and thus worth comes to perfection!"

"Then there's a lot o' folk on the road to being perfect, I take it!" The Minister smiled at his dry way of putting it.

"And about the Will—you believe Claude Cheffinger destroyed it?"

"No, I don't!" answered the old man quickly, "for he could never find it; he was suspected, and it was put away for a better than he to find! You'd never believe how cunning and suspicious, and hateful of having him with him the master became towards the end." Mr. Garland had not personally seen anything to dislike in Claude Cheffinger, who received him with every courtesy, but he knew that the presentient prejudice of the aged when nearing mortality is without the pale of our every-day reasoning and favour.

"And have you never made search for this yourself, in the interests of that right you approve?"

"I have done so, but it's a difficult thing to do alone, and Sir Claude is quick. He would guess I'd a motive if he heard of it, because I know the contents and witnessed it. I shouldn't have been here now if you hadn't picked me out, so that nobody could say anything. I've rather avoided coming up here, because from my knowledge of the old master he would very likely hide it somewhere here about; and I don't want Sir Claude to turn me off now!"

"Well, let us make systematic and minute search wherever you fancy it is most likely to be hidden, and if found, I will guarantee you shall not leave the Abbey, and shall, moreover,

be liberally provided for during the remainder of your life; I am the sole friend of Sir Dickson Cheffinger, and I am here in his interests and for this very purpose."

The old man paused a moment, passed his hand across his brow, and seemed to be lost in thought; then, without speaking a word, joined the other at his close examination of the Abbey lumber. Everything was contained in the old garrets, from chipped paintings to broken cabinet-work, from Venetian glass to Parisian *armes de luxe*. Mr. Garland took up one of the latter curiously and with some admiration, the stock was carved in low relief, the foot being ornamented in silver with Diana preparing for the chase, the barrel with oak foliage, the sides with an animal hunt, in which a frightened wolf upon a tree stump formed the hammer. Claude Cheffinger thought a smooth, perfect English fowling-piece superior to the most artistically executed fusils of Paris or St. Étienne, and consigned beautiful pieces by such celebrated gun-makers as the famous La Roche, Langevin, Le Hollandais, and Bouillet, to oblivion in an oak chest, with small respect for sport of the old school or the traditions of his ancestors.

A line of long, low, quaintly-constructed windows, designed to make the exterior picturesque, admitted light to the very extremities of the garret; where the sloping, shelving roof inclined to the flooring, and yielded covert to the rats and mice, a wonderful race in the garrets of Cheffinger; fat, sleek, and indolent, and not in the least disposed to show respect to the Minister; but he would not have harmed even a rat, until it was clear to him the same was an usurper. This domain afforded the tribe the exercise felled woodlands offer the rabbits, for here had been thrown old rolls of paper-hanging, as, from time to time, proprietor by proprietor, the Abbey walls had been decorated according to the taste of the period; very gorgeous were some of these, as, partly unrolled, they were outspread and laid in confusion, Eastern flowers upon Italian scrolls, and pilasters and panels of tarnished gilt on the delicate chintz-patterned, diapered, and silken-surfaced papers of France.

"He was very deep, you know!" whispered the old man,

hands and knees on the floor, pulling the dusty rolls away, and keenly scrutinizing the roof and floor where they met at an angle. "He'd put it where a sharp body like Sir Claude, even, would not think of looking for it, that's why I leave the chests and other things to look round the flooring." He was knocking with his knuckles while whispering this, on the inclined ceiling; and the Minister, stooping, watched operations with keen interest. The whitewash sounded evenly solid, and left no suspicion of the smallest hollow existing; the boards of the flooring had evidently not been disturbed since there laid down. The old man crawled backward, and slowly resumed a standing position, complaining he did not feel so young and active as of yore. And then his face shone, a bright idea having returned to him. "I've often thought there's room under the eaves for hiding anything, and not many would think of looking there."

"Yes, but, my good friend, would not your old master equally much have cared to place the Will where it *would* some day be found by a person favourable to Sir Dickson? And it seems to me hiding it below the eaves would imperil the prospect of its ever being found at all!"

"Ay, it do seem like it, what with the weather and the rooks!"

"We must continue our search amongst the curiosities depend upon it."

The cheerfulness with which the Minister recommenced betokened that it was no distasteful occupation. To some minds such exploration possesses fascination; like turning over the contents of an old book-store, each upheaval brings to light something valued in the past, by those whose span is shorter than that of such objects, but whose soul lives, as the soul of a book lives long, when paper is worm-eaten and binding and encasing have gone to dust. With a half reverent touch the Minister reversed the relics and remains: steel coffers with intricate locks; bellows of walnut wood, carved in high relief; flasks in *cuir boulli;* Damascened metallic mirrors; old roundels of beechwood, painted with mottoes; drug-pots dating from days of the witch-finders: antique Hispano-

Moresco ware, broken, defaced, and useless, but still beautiful, and historic of Spanish periods; a bronze bust, its cold, green-black, stolid face veiled by more tender lines—thanks to the spiders—than in the life or out of it had been its portion; lacquered ware of a bygone fashioning, broad and unsightly; an old shield, the tazza studded with antique coins, having a recumbent lion at top, supporting an enamelled coat of arms; a frieze of hunters, *à l'antique:* they might for their condition have been to the wars; a celadon vase in pieces: each piece a gem; and an old genealogical chart, with the record of patents of nobility and grants of land bestowed upon the Cheffingers of Cheffinger. This last was in a carved frame; no glass covered it, the dust lay thick on it; and for the moment Mr. Garland believed it one of those samplers the dames of fine degree delighted to mark, in perpetuation of their own skill and their ancestors' birthdays; but, taking it up, he discovered its significance, and traced with surprise the high lineage of CHEFFINGER; and he was following with his finger the various nobles and honours of the family, when it traced a line not marked upon the parchment, some folded document was inserted between the chart and the board at its back.

"I've found it, I verily believe!" and rather elated by the discovery, Westley Garland, without compunction, stripped Cheffinger of its honours in favour of its latest representative. The old retainer leaned nervously by him, and shook while the Minister removed and unfolded the Will.

"Yes, that's it, and there's my name!" pointing it out with tremulous excitement.

Coolly as he had once before placed in his pocket a very different document in which Sir Dickson Cheffinger was interested, did the Minister secure the Will. He again assured the old servant of future reward, and having bestowed present highly-liberal recompense, Mr. Garland quitted Cheffinger Abbey, while Sir Claude was with his guests still enjoying the chase with renewed ardour.

* * * * * *

Returning to his humble lodging one evening, very fagged and worn, Mr. Cheffinger was surprised to find a curious-

looking individual awaiting him, and it is notable that for this person, perhaps stirred by an inner sense of distrust, he found no title whatever. In truth he was not prejudiced in favour of the stranger by his appearance, which, many as were the singular beings with whom Mr. Cheffinger mixed, was, in his opinion, the most singular he had seen yet. It was no other than the energetic Mr. Rolf, still upon the business of his chief; and the visit was intended to be an exceedingly serious one, so far as Dickson Cheffinger was concerned. Without paying the poor gentleman even the compliment of calling in the faculty for an affirmative opinion, it was definitely decided that Dickson Cheffinger should be consigned to a madhouse, and, for economy, to a private establishment of the lower and more brutal order.

"In taking this step," the chief explained, "we are studying the interests of Society; this man has no business to be at large; if he isn't mad, he ought to be; it won't be safe for people to walk about the public streets soon; the Government is negligent, we set the example, as we often do; initiate the prosecution, sustain the whole cost of the inquiry, maintain this afflicted fellow-being while under restraint; and if, after this service to our country, we are not deserving of special commendation next session, I shall lose faith in the morality and grateful appreciation of my countrymen!"

Mr. Cheffinger was late, he had kept the visitor in a state of impatient waiting a very long time. The most uncertain being in existence, Mr. Cheffinger yet contrived to arrive home each evening some time between six and nine o'clock; his best friend would not have ventured to predict to half-an-hour the time of his appearing. The landlady gruffly told Mr. Rolf that her lodger came home to tea; and he, unaware of the Cheffinger laxity in regard to the time of taking that meal, had been irritably waiting since half-past four. Mr. Cheffinger appeared upon the scene at half-past eight, when the visitor introduced his business without further ceremony. "Sir Dickson Cheffinger I think?" with a short, surly inclination of the head. Mr. Rolf was not one to waste politeness, especially upon some one going immediately into a straight waistcoat.

"The same, sir!" With a very gracious bow; for Cheffinger would have honoured his executioner with a gracious bow.

"Cousin of Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger?" giving an upward jerk of the head, which might or might not indicate the last named cousin's head being decidedly riveted the tightest, in the opinion of Mr. Bartholomew.

"His remote cousin, sir!" Mr. Cheffinger mildly explained; he had suffered too keenly through that usurper to admit the relationship with any extravagant pleasure.

"Of Cheffinger Abbey?" Bartholomew might have been the ancient parish beadle calling over the roll preliminary to the other's refreshing season in the stocks.

The poor gentleman did not notice it, mere cold mention of the well-loved name thrilled him, sent the colour to his face, warmed him to the heart, and he repeated with enthusiasm, "Yes! of Cheffinger Abbey!" leaning hungrily upon the words to come. Oh! to hear something of CHEFFINGER!

"You will please accompany me to my house to-night, and start with me by first train to-morrow morning; these are the wishes of Sir Claude himself."

"My patience, you don't say so? His heart is touched at last! He will make restitution yet." The speaker went up close to his wolfish informant, laid a finger upon his greasy cuff, looked full at the bristly chin; not at the eyes, they made him feel uncomfortable; and he said, in a low, solemn voice, "I've been waiting so long for justice, forty years, sir, and it doesn't come; so this movement on the part of Claude is doubly welcome. It is a long time where one is not provided for!"

"My principal will see about providing for you without loss of time; we'll start."

He opened the door. The poor gentleman was like the other eager to depart. One look round, a sort of good-bye look such as the tender-hearted bestow before leaving some scene of pain, anxiety, or struggle, for a different sphere; and then he went to a dirty little sideboard, and took therefrom a cracked old china tea-cup. It had no saucer, and looked very desolate and isolated, yet from this the Princess had taken tea

with Sir Dickson Cheffinger, and it had been precious to him ever since. He regarded it with fondness a minute or two, while the tall man waited in the doorway, thinking what a piece of justice it was, this contemplated fettering of so mad a being; then Mr. Cheffinger asked seriously,—

"I suppose I am not likely to return here?"

"Not at all likely!"

"Then I must settle with my landlady!" The visitor raised no objection, and he did so, joining his guide after a few minutes; the tea-cup, of which he had become the happy possessor, being safely stowed away in his pocket.

Mr. Bartholomew Rolf took particular care that his easily knocked-about companion was not upset during the journey. Upon arriving at his dwelling in Gray's Inn Road, he at once ushered the Cheffinger claimant into the presence of Mrs. Rolf, who was sitting before the fire roasting chestnuts; her shoes—large, square-toed shoes—on the upmost bar.

Taking advantage of her mother being asleep and of Mr. Rolf's being away, Edith Lessie had paid a surreptitious visit to the unhappy captive of a dark back room, where little Ella had been securely locked up; and of all the miserable adventures that had befallen the child this was the most painful. Pale, and with traces of many tears on the delicate cheeks, she, with her softer, harmless, appealing beauty, quite moved the heart of the daughter of Laïs; and she went to her to comfort her. She did not succeed very well, having nothing comforting to say, and being unable to comply with Ella's entreaty to be let out into the street,—anywhere to get away from that house. But the fourteen-year one took the younger, as an elder girl does, and, by that mystic influence none can account for, imparted solace without any talk over it.

Times were looking dark with the Minister's daughter. Now by laws passing in life as coincidences, in drama as extravagancies, that feeble one, the man they thought mad, who had been so long upon the trail of this same girl, and with whom times were so dark, was brought to that house also, captive to the strength and cunning of these brutal tools

of the chief. Altogether the Rolf family proved faithful in the service of the Devil.

Mrs. Rolf did not alter her lady-like position; Mr. Cheffinger stood looking at the back view of the coil of yellow hair; Mr. Rolf drew off his long brown coat, which with his hat he gave to Edith, saying, "Take the gentleman's." The gentleman handed his threadbare great-coat to the girl with a polite bow and most agreeable smile. Cheffinger was quite himself. Things were taking a turn; ere very long he would come into possession of his own; he felt it so, and was happy, and with great gallantry went near the fire and made a polite bow also to the lady warming her toes. But Mrs. Rolf caught up the fire-shovel, and cried out with expression, "Don't you come snickering around me. Keep him off, Bartholomew, or I don't answer for the consequences!"

Neither could Bartholomew; therefore he called off the being who affrighted his lady. Mr. Cheffinger supposed her to be troubled with chilblains, and was animated with pity; he seated himself at the faded table-cover, following thereon with his finger a line straggling away, and which seemed to him mapping the road to Cheffinger. Mr. Rolf said,—

"I think I should like some tea, my dear."

"At this time of night? Won't whisky do?"

"Do afterwards; at present I prefer t'other, for I've been done out o' mine waiting for Sir Dickson Cheffinger." Sir Dickson rose, remarking,—

"I'm so sorry, and I never offered you any! I was detained; I meant to have come home, too, for I had a letter to write, but the Marquis of Westminster button-holed me so tightly in Palace Yard I couldn't get away; but I apologize, really!"

Mrs. Rolf turned herself leisurely, and took a good long look at the speaker, returning to her cookery directly afterwards; she had some salt in a piece of newspaper on her knee, and savoured the hot nuts at pleasure, but now she placed her paper of salt on the mantelpiece, and raising her apron full of shells, deposited them liberally over fire, hearth, and fender.

"It's an awful bother, Bartholomew, but I suppose if you want tea you must have it."

"And with great gallantry went near the fire and made a polite bow."—PAGE 456.

"I believe that's the rule in this house, Mrs. Rolf." Without further manifestation of annoyance, beyond knocking the crockery about and causing Sir Dickson excruciating terror by her awkwardness, the fair one set tea, despatching her daughter to the cookshop for a plate of 'chicken and 'am.' Altogether, if this couple represented Cousin Claude's choice of acquaintance, Sir Dickson did not think much of his taste.

The viands were brought, and devoured by the host, Sir Dickson, poor gentleman, who was beginning to feel exceedingly faint, not being invited to partake of tea or anything else. After a while Mr. Bartholomew said, "Better show Sir Dickson to his room, my dear."

He followed the lady forth with a courteous good night to his host, and a kind smile bestowed upon Edith. Outside they passed a tall, singularly upright female, walking with the seriousness of Lady Macbeth, and carrying a tin chamber-candlestick, the extinguisher of which, hanging by a piece of old boot-lace, swung before the spectral lady like a plummet, and seemed designed to preserve her perpendicularity unique. This was Madame Reignard, the other lodger; teacher of the piano, of singing, and of deportment; rather a ghastly person, of an unwholesome sallow hue, and with two large curls either side a face that appeared carved of stone, and to have been left out in the yard to be coloured the original London colour. Madame was a peculiar person, and while being undoubtedly clever, was distinguished by odd little ways which were a source of great discomfort to her neighbours. One of these eccentricities took the form, whenever she was at home, of sitting at her piano and playing one melody. She had never been known to play anything else, and as it chanced to be *God save the Queen*, it exercised a depressing influence upon those living within hearing, who thus passed an existence upon the brink of something always concluded. Various were the solutions suggested for the phenomenon. One had it that Madame held to the conviction that if she did not keep playing this national melody, the Queen of the country would topple off the throne; another said the late M. Reignard had been

conductor of a popular band, and expired in the performance of this anthem; a third was of opinion that M. and Madame once kept a music-shop, over the door of which were the Royal arms, the same having fallen and brained the unfortunate proprietor; all mere speculation, but people do speculate; and these were nothing to some of the ideas broached; all of which had little bearing on the National Anthem. Sometimes the lady would rise in the middle of the night, seat herself solemnly on the rickety music-stool, and discourse her favourite tune until every loyal subject within hearing devoutly wished that her Majesty was safe and have done with it.

Sir Dickson Cheffinger looked upon this strange being with emotion; there was a stateliness of mien, and almost regal sternness about the face that impressed him deeply, and he wondered much what illustrious and unfortunate being she was; perhaps some banished sovereign; or one who had never been banished, and never reigned, but who looked forward with sublime expectancy to the time when that should be. Sir Dickson knew that such things did happen, and he was full of sympathy; and when, some hours later, he was awakened by lugubrious strains, he arose and dressed himself, stood out in the passage in the dark, and listened. At such a time the inspiring if dolorous composition had overpowering effect upon Sir Dickson. All was silent in the house but for that strange performance proceeding from below. To have expected Sir Dickson to control his knightly and chivalrous ardour would have been to expect him to be false to himself. He followed the sound with brave and courtly bearing, knocking his head against everything that came in his way. When, however, he reached the bottom of the stairs, the music abruptly ceased, and Sir Dickson stood in the passage wondering, while a ray from a Gray's Inn Road gas-lamp illumined a flying battalion of beetles. Why had that appeal to the heart so suddenly become silent? Groping about Sir Dickson all at once became motionless; he heard violent sobbing, and stooping by a door discovered it proceeded from within that chamber. It fired the spirit of romantic enthusiasm, which entered so largely into his being; there could be no doubt the

imperial performer was in sore trouble, without a champion, defender, or supporter; he would seek an instant interview, and lay the offer of his service, his sympathy, his allegiance, and his fortune, at her gracious feet. He fumbled at the door, first gently knocking, next trying the handle; it was locked fast, and must be locked on the outside, or she could surely open it, if but an inch; the thought of her being a prisoner still further stirred Sir Dickson, and he pondered, ultimately hitting upon a plan that for a man declared mad was a happy one. He cautiously went in search of a key, trying the other doors, and finding one, brought it triumphantly to his captive's door, and excitedly introduced it into the lock, and could neither turn nor withdraw it. Then Sir Dickson pondered again, and tried the refractory instrument once more, humoured it this time, and after a due interval of obstinacy it came out with ease. The poor knight found one more key, and with every care applied it to the lock; it opened the door with docility. It was very dark, and Sir Dickson's delicacy induced him to pause, while saying, "I am sorry I have no light with me, you will not distinguish friend from foe; I have come to release you!" The inmate of the chamber uttered a little cry of joy, her sobs ceased, and with eagerness she implored,—

"If you will only take me away from here I will pray that you may be rewarded for ever, sir! A woman brought me to this house, pretending she came from my mother. They threaten to kill me if I am not quiet, and I am sure will do so!"

"No they will not," said Sir Dickson, "while I am in the house; but who are you? From the voice it should be a young lady of gentility."

"I am the daughter of Mr. Lionel Travers, of Torquay."

"Now by the Peerage is it so? Then I am in fortune's way to-night!" This half to himself, and with no little surprise and gratification.

"And we have lost poor Papa; that is why we are in London."

"I know all about it, and will soon have you out of this bewildering City! You've heard your Papa talk about his

friend Mr. Garland, of course? Well, he has been looking for yourself and Lady Travers for a long time."

It was confusing, and the child felt she had no time to unravel it; the longing for liberty was paramount. She went to his side with touching confidence, and begged, "Take me away, dear sir, now, lest we be heard!"

"To be sure I will; not that there is anything to fear, Miss Travers, while I am by your side."

He thought of his journey in the morning, and of his prospects. But before these he thought of that good friend in Brighton, whose heart would be gladdened by this recovery or discovery—Sir Dickson did not quite know which—of the little girl. Without hesitation, both as they were, hatless, coverless, hand in hand, they made for the street; Sir Dickson without excess of caution unchaining and unbolting the street door. Mrs. Rolf was essentially a sleepy subject, and heard nothing; Mr. Rolf was a hard-worked and fatigued mortal, and slept the sleep of the honourable, and heard nothing; not so the imperial musician, who, sitting at the piano in a somnolent state, suddenly heard the rattle of the chain, and dashed into the anthem for her Majesty's preservation; and this was the thrilling strain that played out Sir Dickson with Ella.

The streets were cold, and, as they hastened along, it all at once occurred to him he had no definite destination. He had rushed out to go to Brighton, but that was scarcely a defined intention. One thing was certain, without overcoat, hat, or a penny piece, leading this lonely child in a corresponding plight, he stood an undoubted chance of being pertinently questioned by the police. Sir Dickson did not particularly love the protectors of our civil rights.

"I know what I will do!" cried Sir Dickson, struck by a bright idea, "I will call upon Lord Dalton, he will aid us in this emergency!"

It was a *détour* by faith; he could not tell whether the elegant Baronet was in town or no, but he proceeded West, and arrived at Sir Kinnaird's residence in Piccadilly long before the earliest of morning hues lent colour to the Park. With a ring that alarmed the entire mansion, Sir Dickson, shivering

with the cold, stood upon the step with his young charge. Sir Kinnaird Dalton, who was in town, heard the bell with disgust.

"Fire, bet a sovereign, awful nuisance, wish to goodness I'd got some chloroform in the room, for I couldn't get out of a window if I was singeing!"

The labour of imagining the confusion, the excitement, and subverted order of things, consequent upon an alarm of fire, so prostrated the Baronet that he drew the eider coverlet, the silk-embroidered blankets, and cobweb tissue sheet well about his delicate ears, and left things to burn or otherwise.

The thoughtful Simmons, much shocked by the unseemly disturbance in the dead of the night, clothed himself hastily and proceeded to ascertain the cause. One of the servants had softly unfastened and opened the door, and was interrogating the man and child upon the door-step when Simmons arrived. That worthy immediately recognized the gentleman of many titles, and inviting him with every consideration into an ante-room, had the door closed again and despatched the servant to arouse the under housekeeper, and request she would summon one of the maids. It was all done with that consummate speed, silence, and tact, in which Simmons was so perfect an adept. He had no intention of permitting his master to be aroused before the usual time, or to be annoyed by any commotion whatsoever, and as a matter of fact Sir Kinnaird had gone to sleep again, quite happy, with the dainty smile upon the mouth, and remarking with half cynical sweetness, "If I must burn I must, but at all events it shall be comfortably." It excited him so little that he passed off to sleep instantly; at that hour he did not pretend even to realize the, to most people, highly unpleasant situation; any situation, either pleasant or unpleasant, Sir Kinnaird avoided carefully; the exertion of grappling with a situation or a position was utterly beyond him.

Simmons by diligently remembering what he had overheard knew perfectly well Sir Kinnaird's wishes with respect to the little girl. Simmons had no doubt this was the identical one, and took care to see that herself and her companion were well entertained until Sir Kinnaird rose and dressed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OF BEING WORTH ONE'S WEIGHT IN SILVER.

Great was the annoyance of the heir to Froggypond when he discovered that his revered relative rather sided with those who were anxious to mark their appreciation of the civil, moral, and intellectual worth of which he was the reputed possessor.

"The only thing I have to say against it, Elmore, (and I must confess I feel surprised the emblem of our house has not occurred to the people who profess to think so highly of its present representative,) is that the service of plate so far as I can understand will not perpetuate in gold or silver the memory of our frogs!"

"I hope not, I'm sure!"

"Elmore!" The old lady sat bolt upright, in a yellow-brown silk dress covered with large green spots; she looked severely upon her grandson willing to explain,—

"I do not care to see our frogs caricatured, dear Grandma, and no local craftsman could do justice to them!"

Much pacified, Mrs. Elsynge gently went on to say how gratifying to her was this public evidence of the regard in which Elmore was held.

"I have always hoped my boy that you would let me see you do something that would be a pride to me!"

"But I hav'n't done anything, that's the nuisance of it!"

"Never mind, they are going to give you a Testimonial, so it is just the same! Depend on't my dear, unless these shrewd and discriminating men of business had detected that virtue and probity which it has always been the pride of

our house to possess, they would never have thought out this elaborate expression of regard, this manifestation of affection for you, this testimonial to the honourable standing of your family; you should feel highly complimented my dear! For a long time I have known something was about to happen: night after night the venerable friends yonder met at one spot and uttered one sound—it was an anthem of jubilee, Elmore, and it meant that the last of the Elsynges was to be awarded the palm for integrity and virtue!"

Mr. Elsynge did not feel to be particularly gifted with either, but he left his grandmamma in blissful ignorance and rode home to dinner.

The gentleman certainly had one weakness that was ineradicable—the love of horses. Actuated by his fondness for equine spectacles, his inclination after dinner led him to pay a visit to Ringdom and Tanner's Hippodrome, then located on the Green. But how far was it consistent for a man about to receive a public testimonial to his civil, moral, and intellectual worth, and who was the present representative of the integrity, virtue, and probity of a family whereof a froggy anthem of jubilee had been celebrated in advance, how far was it consistent for such an one to visit fairs, circuses, and places of worldly amusement? That became the question, and Mr. Elsynge decided to talk it over with his friend Bruce, whose lands and residence adjoined the Elsynge estate. Ernest Bruce shared his friend's fondness for field sports and equestrian exercise, but having carefully avoided public engagements, and connexions of all sorts with the class he especially disliked, the commercial community, he laughed very heartily at the dilemma in which his friend was placed, and his advice took the defiant form.

"Give them something to talk about, Elmore, and perhaps they may present it to some other fellow!"

"But you know I never was a free lance; besides, think of the honoured prestige I am expected to support!"

"I don't envy you, but by all means let us finish our cigars and go into the tent!"

They strolled to the Circus, and were ushered to the seats

of honour, extremely insecure seats, Mr. Bruce thought; he was a tall, fine-looking man, broad shouldered, with massive limbs, and possessing innate repugnance to sitting upon a plank, even carpeted. Mr. Elsynge noticed nothing of this, his whole attention from the moment of entering was taken up by observing a beautiful child in the arena.

"A renegade so soon!" said Mr. Bruce in a low voice, watching his friend's intent interest with excessive amusement.

"My dear fellow, did you ever set eyes on such a lovely girl? What a shame she should be here!"

"Hush, control yourself, remember the Testimonial." Mr. Elsynge flushed slightly, threw down the remains of his cigar, shrugged his shoulders and said,—

"What a provoking fellow you are!"

"Envy!"

"I envy these mountebanks always having the company of that girl! I wonder what sort of character she bears?"

"Unapproachable!" said the other mockingly, and Elsynge tapped his foot with his cane impatiently; it seemed impossible that one with so sweet a face could be aught but of lily fairness of life.

"I think her the most beautiful girl I have ever seen," said he with unusual seriousness. It alarmed his friend, who entertained a great distaste for a "lower-order admiration," as he termed it.

"I suppose, like myself, you think each fresh face prettier than the last; but take care to view them according to the laws of perspective. I have carefully avoided the weakness; or I should have been very much struck by something or other in every capital in Europe."

Mr. Elsynge changed the subject, his eyes never straying from the girl, however, so long as she was in the ring.

"Fairish cattle are they not, for travellers?"

"Yes. A trainer told me once he could distinguish in the dark, by feeling the hoof, the different classes,—farm, road, course, battle-field, and circus. I scarcely believe it, but there is no telling!"

Presently the sinuous Joey of Japan made his entrée, and

the gentlemen took their leave. Mr. Bruce could not witness human gyrations, which he said always gave him a headache, and Elsynge was impatient to go behind. Giving his card to a groom he requested permission to inspect the stud, and was conducted to the impromptu stables with much obsequiousness. Having viewed the animals with genuine and admiring interest they were about to leave when the young lady herself passed by.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Elsynge, while she looked up timidly at the abrupt address, her large fawn-like eyes glancing rapidly from his broad good-humoured face to that of his friend. "Do you make a long stay here?"

"We might stay beyond the three Fair days, sir. I do not know Mr. Ringdom's intentions!" And with a modest diffident inclination of the head she passed on.

"Never heard such a voice in my life!" said Elsynge with enthusiasm, forgetting for the moment the unimpressive character beside him.

"Remember the Testimonial!" said Mr. Bruce with sarcastic drollery, "and now come home and have tea with me. I've some fresh Sporting Sketches I should like you to see."

Mr. Elsynge accompanied his friend home, where Mrs. Westwood, the housekeeper, did the honours. Mrs. Westwood was a distant relative. Mr. Bruce could never have tolerated an ordinary salaried person in the close contact inevitable where the housekeeper takes supervision of the establishment. Mrs. Westwood was an exceedingly upright, precise, and decorous lady; at one time the Westwoods kept a carriage, and now that the husband who had purchased and supported it for her pleasure was gone to his rest, this lady-like woman could never forget having at one time been the mistress of an establishment of her own. Mr. Bruce entertained great respect for this distant relative, and the distant relative entertained great respect for Mr. Bruce, thus a balance of goodwill was very happily preserved. All the same she thought him exceedingly untidy in the house, disliked his habit of smoking, disapproved of that ineffable bias stable-wards (poor Westwood had been an intellectual man), and was of opinion that he

ought sometimes to go to church instead of reclining all Sunday upon his luxurious couches reading Sporting papers. (Mrs. Westwood held a theory that every one possessed of luxuriant furniture ought to go regularly to church—to pray fervently that they might never lose it.) Upon one point the distant relatives agreed beautifully—in their liking for Elmore Elsynge; the lady was very polite to the heir, and at night dreamed of the frogs almost as much as the Mistress of Froggypond herself.

When Mr. Elsynge arrived home that evening he found an official-looking communication awaiting him, which read as follows:—

The inhabitants of Seaborough and neighbourhood request the attendance of Elmore Elsynge, Esq., at a Meeting to be held at the Town Hall to morrow afternoon at 3 *o'clock.*

Dr. Hunter in the chair.

(*Signed*) *Solomon Simcox, Hon. Sec.*

"It's come at last!" muttered the heir with a moan of repugnance. "I must go through with it, I suppose!" Thinking considerably more of the chase than of the classics, this accepting a testimonial to his intellectual worth, seemed so like a sailing under false colours that he felt quite uncomfortable in consequence. Mr. Elsynge had no desire to be taken for an intellectual man, in fact he would rather not; he encountered so many of them about, and daily mixed with people who knew so much, that he esteemed it an obvious virtue to know a little less than other people. "Learning is so cheap," said Mr. Elsynge, "it has become decidedly vulgar, and I resolutely decline to augment what little knowledge I unfortunately possess, and refuse to acquire any fresh information whatsoever; so convinced am I that ignorance is bliss, and that the people who know absolutely nothing are the real saviours of society." True this had been said in the presence of the intellectual housekeeper, but it was really as close as could be to the genuine sentiments of this cross-country squire. "Then why," thought he, "should I, of all mortals on this teem-

ing planet, have been selected for the infliction of a testimonial to intellectuality?"

However, his sideboard was to be converted into a shrine of Actæon; while the poor at their gates were sent on to the next town for relief!

"Again," thought the ingrate, "to give a man whose loves have been as many as his years a tribute to his moral worth is a caricature of virtue, very trying to a well-constituted and rightly balanced conscience." And here his thoughts wandered off again in the direction of the Circus. "One can no more help having a passion for pretty girls than one can help having a passion for horses, in fact, they very often go together and mark the same quiet and gentlemanly taste."

Next morning, the morning of the important event, as though Mr. Elsynge was doomed to be tantalized, while riding down to Seaborough to the gunsmith's, the approach of a band of music warned him that the procession of the company was parading the principal streets of the town, and he held his mare in with a firm hand, for if she did not bolt at the sight of that Japanese contortionist she ought to. The cavalcade turned slowly into the High Street; one carriage containing the musicians, who all laboured assiduously at waking the town up; then followed ladies in armour, and knights in various costumes of the nations, not always accurate but effective; retainers bearing banners, and pretty pages upon graceful ponies; chariots of war and chariots of peace, allegoric, florid, and decidedly chilling for those scantily clad ones posed upon the pedestals; obstinate little mules, whereon the jesters played such pranks the good people of Seaborough were much taken thereby, and errand boys behind the sugar tubs, and merchandise cases, made their mind up to aspire for the laurels of the amphitheatre; then came a lady in a black velvet riding habit, upon a highly trained steed, which pranced as though the road was of dirt, whereas it was of singularly noisy and uneven stone; and the procession finally terminated with a lofty car of some magnificence, as cars-processional go, a gilded and mirrored device upon which was a figure of a winged horse, pure white, and astride the horse a girl more

Cupid than fairy, bearing bow and quiver; moreover she was tastefully dressed in blue satin and silver; and as Mr. Elsynge caught sight of the pretty one thus elevated, he exclaimed "Never saw anything so lovely in my life!" He had reined in before the shop of Sticky, the grocer, and Uriah was in the balcony watering Tom Thumb geraniums; it was a darkly significant look Sticky sent to Mrs. Sticky, who was waiting to refill the water-pot, just within the little room above the shop.

Mr. Elsynge rode on, thinking what a charming companion the girl would be, when older, to accompany one to the hunt, the races, or the Park in town during the season. His yellow riding-gloved hand seemed all at once monstrously thick, while the thought of the waxen cheek and rosebud mouth sent a thrill to his heart; it would be a joyous piece of fortune to be the possessor of so dainty a treasure. "Talk about a testimonial to a man's civil, moral, and intellectual worth; that's the sort of testimonial for me!" With which wicked remark to himself he arrived at his gunsmith's.

Mr. Elsynge went home to luncheon. Meantime at a preliminary meeting assembling at the house of Mr. Alderman Gubbins, there was a reactionary movement. In consequence of a circumstance communicated by their dear friend Sticky, public opinion was divided. Mr. Sticky had informed the meeting that Mr. Elsynge spent some hours on the preceding evening with the questionable females of the Circus, and he had overheard him in the town that day openly express admiration for one of them, and Mr. Sticky feared the people were making a mistake; in his opinion, Elmore Elsynge, Esq., was not a fit and proper person to become the recipient of so splendid a testimonial. This was contested by Bacchus Bin (with whom the Squire's account was large), he was well acquainted with Mr. Elsynge's love of horses, and he had probably gone behind to inspect them; as for expressing admiration for one member of the company, he (Bacchus Bin) had heard there *was* one at all events fully worthy of such admiration. At which Mr. Sticky was heard to pronounce the terrible word "Shechem," almost in the tone of a judgment, and there was an ominous calm; then Mr. Sticky, with righteous and virtuous emotion, said he

felt conscientiously compelled to withdraw his subscription. Mr. Bin replied that since the subscriptions had poured in from rich and poor alike beyond all expectation, it would not seriously impoverish the Fund if Mr. Sticky did withdraw it. The grocer left the house of Mr. Alderman Gubbins, much hurt, and confident the prophet Ezekiel had flourished more particularly for this generation than for any other. Mr. Smelt, the fishmonger, was sorry a doubt had been cast upon the object of their interest, but if what his friend, Mr. Sticky, had said was true, it certainly altered the aspect of affairs—really it was more a question of esteem than of money. Bacchus Bin replied that some people were fonder of parting with their esteem than with their money, and a few were precious niggardly with both. Mr. Smelt said he had a suspicion all was not quite the thing, and that was why he did not press the Memorial Window. Mr. Bin answered that Elmore Elsynge, Esq., was one of the good old stock, and would, he was quite sure, decline the testimonial altogether if it came to his knowledge there were dissentient voices. Mr. Smelt kindly said he didn't want to cause painful confusion of that sort, he would be quite justified in adopting his friend Sticky's example and withdrawing his subscription. Mr. Bin was happy to say Mr. Smelt's contribution hadn't been melted down in the making of the magnificent piece of Plate, then at the Town Hall, and he should feel much pleasure in moving that their respected treasurer, Mr. Simcox, return the said contribution there and then. This was done, and Mr. Smelt left the house of Alderman Gubbins much relieved; and he remarked in confidence to Mrs. Smelt, that out of the seven thousand known species of fish, he thought Scaborough was especially noted for flats.

Mr. Vault, the stonemason, here trespassed, as he called it, upon the attention of the assembly, and ventured an opinion that it was to some extent satisfactory that his proposition of the Obelisk had not been carried out, since all such imperishable monuments bearing record to the—

Here some commotion was caused by the huge black cat attached to the Aldermanic establishment, clawing its way up

Mr. Vault's back, causing the speaker to wince with the pain and cease abruptly: the cat couchant upon Vault's shoulder glared with ghastly green eyes upon the meeting, one member of which, who was nervous in the matter of black cats, grumbled something about its being like "a death's head," and was seized with a violent fit of coughing; then taking a grubby-looking, evil-smelling lozenge from his waistcoat pocket, he placed this in the aperture nearest the seat of trouble, and the noise was by degrees allayed. After this Mr. Easel, the artist, begged to remind his friends that Mr. Elsynge was fond of painting, and if seen talking with some young member of the Circus company, it was merely, no doubt, to arrange for some picturesque transfer in permanent pigments. An old gentleman, name unknown, who was taking snuff, here curtly muttered "Exactly," but the tone of voice was ironic, and the gentleman's countenance so vindictive, that the impression created was unfavourable. Then several commencing to talk at once, Mr. Silverside called to order: Mr. Silverside said he had heard the remarks of his respected fellow-townsmen with disgust and indignation, he had as great a regard for peace and order as any person, but he must say, and he thought the meeting would say with him, when he said that he must say there had been more than enough said about what there was nothing to say; and which, when said, amounted to nothing, say what they would, for what people said, he must say was of little account if said prejudiced, and bearing scandal upon the face of it; and if it was thought exception would be taken to the division of opinion, the presentation, in consequence, would be transferred to somebody else—which really was no business of anybody's, the friends of the deceased having—(here it became but too evident the poor gentleman had lost himself again). Set straight he proceeded to explain and make his meaning clearer, and wished to signify that the friends of Mr. Elsynge would have the gratification of knowing that he knew they had known of all they knew at that time, although then unknown to him, which if he knew, (and, of course, it was known he did not know,) he would, knowing all then known to the meeting, (which, of course, knew nothing of the kind) only have to—

Here Alderman Gubbins, with the cry of a watchman, uttered the warning numerals, "One—Two! We have no time to lose; my friend Mr. Silverside has expressed my own sentiments exactly; I think the meeting may close; in an hour we shall reassemble at the Town Hall; I have a note from Dr. Hunter saying he will be there to time; the platform has been tastefully decorated, we expect a large attendance, Amen!" The worthy Alderman was an eminently religious man, as was well known, and was so used to family devotion in his household the benediction apostrophe slipped out in lieu of the adieu.

The account of the proceedings was repeated verbatim within half an hour to Mr. Elsynge, by the same obliging informant as heretofore, and it served to increase the gentleman's distaste for this intrinsic piece of sham esteem.

However, he rode to the town, put his horse up, and walked into the Town Hall, was cheered, and conducted to the seat of honour in the front of the platform. Dr. Hunter immediately arose from the chair, and bowing to the gentleman, the audience, and the imposing, albeit slightly commercial, committee upon the platform, opened the proceedings by stating in a lucid, perspicuous manner the object of their assembling; and again the appreciative audience applauded, drowning the critical exclamation of a censorious rural dæmon, which bore an irreverent resemblance to "Gammon!" The proceedings were pursued without further indecorum, and Elmore Elsynge, Esq., quitted the Town Hall the proud possessor of the Piece of Plate. Carefully transported to his house, it was there placed upon a sideboard in the breakfast-room, and very handsome it looked, notwithstanding what Mr. Elsynge might think about it, but having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he naturally entertained less respect for this sort of thing than is customary with mortals whose birth does not partake of argentine favour.

In the evening the gentleman went alone to the Circus; his patience was much tried, there was a tedious bill to sit out before his favourite appeared. Still he endured the ennui, studied the flourish of foreign nomenclature on the

programme, sat indifferent to the staring of a confident female upon his left, and forgave an old gentleman on the plank below, whom he happened to kick in the small of the back, and who turned round sharp and swore at him; having pocketed a cork, which a member of the sixpenny circle had so levelled from a gingerbeer bottle as to mark him, causing him to drop his gold-headed stick into the limbo beneath the planks whereon Messrs. Ringdom and Tanner's genteel patrons were supposed to sit enjoying themselves; after these varied experiences the gentleman was not sorry to see the young performer ushered in with some ceremony by Mr. Ringdom himself, and looking prettier than ever in her fluttering petals of rose and white gauze. She then went through a series of such graceful evolutions that Mr. Elsynge's admiration of her lissom, fluent action, and extreme beauty was much increased; he saw an unspoken poetry in her movements, a fire of enthusiasm in the splendid dash with which she went through the acts down for her performance, and like most people in love he saw wrongly: it was her desperate endeavour to conquer timidity; he might have seen, but for being blinded, an almost fierce fixedness of eye, and set hardness of feature, amounting to a look of horror when it came to leaping the paper-covered hoops, a trial of her strength as well as of her skill, for which she was physically unequal. With daring that exhausted her she accomplished half the number of rounds apportioned to the scene, drew in her breath, gave a fawn-like spring, and came through covered with shreds of paper; panting, glowing, stooping again, and as though spending all her remaining strength and courage, giving a tremendous leap and cleaving it again, amidst the plaudits of the people; then breathlessly, more crimson upon the cheek, a dangerous light in the eye, and a frightened look that, as she came round and passed Mr. Elsynge, was plainly detected and stirred the blood in his veins, she crouched for one more bound, but her limbs felt clogged with lead, and she fell from the horse, and not until she lay outstretched and motionless did the crowd become conscious of an accident. Before those of the ring or audience had time to rush to her assistance, Mr. Elsynge sprang into

the arena, and, kneeling down, lifted the slight and fragile form. Mr. Ringdom was by his side instantly, a cluster of sympathizers gathered round, amongst others Mr. Elsynge's groom, who having seen his master's movement joined him in the ring. "She is badly hurt," said Mr. Elsynge to the proprietor. "This will be a long and expensive affair; allow her to be taken to my house, where she shall receive every attention and care; my housekeeper will display a mother's tenderness towards her, and I will be answerable for the medical services!" Mr. Ringdom reviewed the position in a trice, it was certain he would lose her services for a prolonged period, and to have the cost of surgical attendance and an apartment for her use the whole of the time staggered him, and he assented, expressing his obligation. Mr. Elsynge despatched his man for the carriage; meanwhile the child, who lay insensible, had been carried gently to the dressing-tent, where the cool air revived her, and she opened her eyes, moaning piteously. "I know something of falls, Mr. Ringdom," said the Squire, "and fear this is a serious one, but if she escaped the hoofs it may not be so bad as seems probable. Here is my card; yourself or Mrs. Ringdom will, of course, call and see our poor little sufferer whenever it is agreeable!"

"In the name of Mrs. Ringdom, permit me to thank you, sir. This kindness from a comparative stranger is overpowering to us. Believe me, we are not insensible to your patronage. We have had the honour of performing before most of the aristocracy of the kingdom; our efforts to please by high-class entertainment and superlative talent has been appreciated; we do not rely upon elephants, nor Arabs, nor worn-out drama, nor military spectacle, nor jockey acts and steeple-chasing, which the dimensions of the building don't admit of, but we provide individual talent of the highest excellence, and the most accomplished artistes money will engage. Mr. Tanner is not here to-day; we have another establishment, now located at Bath; Mr. Tanner is at Bath, but I will not fail to communicate to him your generous courtesy. Perhaps next time we have the honour to visit Seaborough, you will permit us to announce the evening's entertainment as under the immediate

patronage and in the presence of Elmore—Elmore (looking close at the card) Elsynge, Esq.?"

"Oh! with pleasure, Mr. Ringdom. Pardon me, I see my servant; we will have our patient borne tenderly, please, to the carriage."

A commotion in the Circus compelled the proprietor to hasten thither. The audience refused to witness the Bounding Brothers until Mr. Ringdom had reassured them as to the safety of their favourite. Mr. Ringdom, raising his white-gloved hand, signified his wish to address the audience. At first there was some hissing, but the proprietor waited with composure until silence was restored, when he spoke as follows:—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I ask the favour of your kind attention. The accident you have witnessed, and which no one deplores more than myself, is not unusual in an amphitheatre. (Hisses, and shouts of 'No! no!') But I say it is *not* unusual, and if any person present understands more about the management of the hippodrome than I do, let him come into the ring, and I'll walk out of it! (Cheers and applause.) Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your confidence. (State bow, natural to chiefs of the *manége*.) I have been travelling with one or more tented companies and studs for thirty-five years, and I have always met with the courtesy you extend to me to-day, and always without unseemly interruption." (Great confusion amongst the opposition, with hissing.) The Bounding Brothers brought in a tub, and the proprietor mounted it, and lifting his white-gloved hand, shouted, "If this continues the performances will terminate abruptly. This establishment has been conducted in a respectable manner, and shall continue to be. (A lull.) Upon three previous occasions when we have visited your town our efforts to amuse have afforded general satisfaction, or we should not have come here again. Upon our next visit, I have authority for saying the evening's entertainment will be under the distinguished patronage of Elmore Elsynge, Esq. (Terrific cheers, and State bow again.) Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to assure you the young lady is not seriously injured, although she will not

probably be able to return to her duties for some days. I have been requested to allow her to be removed in the care of a kind friend of influence and position present this evening, and I have consented. You will thus see I am not endeavouring to smuggle off a victimized body, as any one might suppose from your manifestation of feeling. Ladies and gentlemen, the performances will proceed without further interruption. Mr. George Turpin, Australian bare-backed rider, will next have the honour of appearing."

Mr. Ringdom retired amidst continuous applause, the Bounding Brothers rolling the tub after him, and not looking particularly pleasant.

Meanwhile, upon the way home Mr. Elsynge called upon Dr. Hunter, and took that patient professional gentleman with him. The doctor had always held to the opinion that if he waited with patience some stranger from distant parts might benefit by his skill, it being a matter of certainty that nothing would ever happen to the Sleperton and Seaborough people; and the lady who presided over the Elsynge housekeeping attended to the comfort of the poor sufferer, with many an ejaculation of tender sympathy and admiring interest. The doctor sat upon one side of the bed with grave solicitude, Mr. Elsynge upon the other, looking with anxiety towards Dr. Hunter for an opinion. The doctor assumed a profoundly learned and scientific air, appearing slightly troubled, while deeply impressed with the responsibility of the case. Dr. Hunter, as the leading practitioner of Seaborough, did not immediately offer an opinion; medical men of any eminence think a long time before speaking. Then Dr. Hunter said, "There is no cause for apprehension; these intermittent periods of semi-conscious suffering will pass away. At present it is mere speculation to prophesy, but I think I may assure you that the issue will be favourable to the patient. To my mind her constitution is too fragile for any arduous exertion; perfect rest, absolute quietness, exclusion of irritants, such as tobacco-smoke and oranges, which recall by pungency of their scent the atmosphere of the Circus. A little brandy and water now, and some warmed milk later on, and the mixture that I will

send to be taken about every three hours, and you will, by this time to-morrow evening, see a remarkable change for the better."

Fortunately nothing very serious had occurred, as Dr. Hunter knew perfectly well, merely a dizziness, faintness, and the shock to the system, consequent upon her fall; so, as the doctor said, rest and quiet, and the kind nursing of her new friends, would, all being well, go far towards restoring her to health.

In the morning Mr. and Mrs. Ringdom paid an early visit to their pupil, as they described her. Mr. Elsynge received them in the breakfast-room, and while Mrs. Ringdom accompanied the housekeeper to the bedside, an interesting transaction occurred downstairs. It arose in this way:—The Circus proprietor was attracted by the resplendent testimonial, with its massive horses in silver, and gentlemen of the chase in silver, the umbrageous silver foliage, and rippling stream over rocks of silver, and being a disciple of effect, was so struck by the *tout ensemble* of the entire arrangement, that he stood before it speechless, hands on hips, head first on one side and then on the other, and at last exclaimed to the exceedingly amused owner, "This is a tableau of magnificence, sir! A—tableau—of—magnificence!"

"Yes, it's a handsome piece, isn't it? Cost a lot of money, I believe."

"That I know it did: never saw anything that took my fancy as this does." This Mr. Ringdom said with genuine sincerity, and, since it was more horse than harp, it was very likely to be a pre-eminent attraction to his fancy.

And now an idea, bright as the testimonial, flashed upon the heir to Froggypond. With his accustomed coolness and indifference to consequences he seized his opportunity and said,—

"I will treat you with open-hearted candour, Mr. Ringdom, and submit an exchange. I've taken a strong fancy to your pretty pupil, you've taken a strong fancy to my piece of plate; if you are content to leave her with me for good, she shall be well and honourably cared for, and you are welcome to yonder

specimen of the silversmith's artistic workmanship." Having said which, the speaker sauntered indolently to the window, and poked at a gold fish with his richly-chased pencil-case.

Mr. Ringdom thought this one of those gold and silver jests gentlemen in society are addicted to when the humour takes them, and he remarked, "I think I should have the best of the exchange, sir."

"Never mind; that's my look out. If you're agreeable, say so, and sit down at the table and write out the transfer. I will send my servant round to your place for the agreement, or indentures, or whatever else binds this poor child to the life which, according to learned medical opinion, she is anything but fitted for, and which she cordially hates, as I can gather from the painful moaning when she is unconscious."

Mr. Ringdom deliberated. He had no doubt whatever that she would escape at the first opportunity; he knew better than Mr. Elsynge how cordially she hated the life, and there was truth in the remark concerning her strength. Still, it is probable Mr. James Ringdom would never have yielded but for that glittering and costly exchange.

"Done!" he said, and sat down at the table and wrote out the contract. Mr. Elsynge, the more unmoved of the two, was nevertheless hugely delighted to have disposed of the testimonial to such profitable account, and his risible faculties were in a state of elation when he thought of what would be said by "our dear friend Sticky," and the dear friends of that dear friend. "They'll never invite me to wear the chain of office any more," thought the heir, with grim satisfaction.

Cross purposes still. Here, in one part of the land, the Minister is pleading for this little mortal's future, while in another she is bartered for a piece of plate, and taken under the protection of a wealthy, and, as it fortunately happened, honourable gentleman. What a tapestry is life! How interwoven the dark with the light! Thus far there was more of dark than light in this poor child's brief story, and a darkness made up of so much misery and grief as is not often endured in a young life; yet we are told that from disease the pearl is formed, and from the earth ariseth the lily. Some of the poems

of the world have stood in calm, sweet power, no matter if without other poems to support and carry them onward with the help of companionship; there are living poems which neither time nor man, cross purposes nor thwarted hopes, have any power to spoil. The plaintiveness of a soul sighing itself forth in music never was and never will be disregarded for all time: the song and sigh are twined awhile, but not for long.

And what now will become of 'Walter's' calm longing for union with her own? And what of the musings and dreamy ideals? She has had visions of valleys, bathed in golden sunlight, and purple heights rising from clear water, winding amidst the flowers as though to tie them with a silver thread into clustering groups; she has dreamt of a life passed in some blissful sphere where hardship and persecution are unknown, dreamt that she would one day discover that peaceful state. But the times are hard with her now, she is moaning with pain, blanched are her cheeks, her little mouth is more encircled with lilies than roses, and she has dread recollections of the late sorrowful time with her hard task-masters when her great mournful eyes dwelt thoughtfully on the tanned ring: that, and the faces of those about her, brown and unlovely; much as may some fair Israelitish girl of old have gazed wearily upon the tawny sand, when—

> "It bare in it the ruts of chariot wheels,
> Which erst had carried to their pagan prayers
> The brown old Pharaohs."

Yet even as in Spain you hear children of the vineyards singing while they toil, hear bursts of song from out the groves upon the hills, until in the cool of eventide the beautiful slopes are lyrical and resonant, and the passing traveller calls it the land of minstrelsy, so this little one's heart sang to her hard lot, and encouraged flagging hope, while her fancy had hung the dark days with pictures which cheered many a saddened hour.

Like a poem her life had once flashed into an hour's splendour, and had as quickly paled, there were brilliant glimmerings of hope for a little while, when it really seemed as if the intricate toils of her misfortunes were about to be broken through; but

this accident appeared to have upset everything, and to have revived all her perilous prospects.

Had Elmore Elsynge been hewn from the hardest of marbles, or cast in the most enduring of bronzes, he could scarcely have resisted the plaintive loveliness of this child; if he had admired her amidst late surroundings, he thought far more admiringly of her in helpless and touching dependence, now, upon himself. It was an exquisite feeling brought along with it. "If anything in the world would make a good man of me, it is this! I will be a true gentleman and friend to her in every thought and word and deed!" And herein Elmore Elsynge, Esq., proved or promised to prove more than ever before, the legitimacy of his claim to the regard of his fellows on civil, moral, and intellectual grounds.

The course of our allegory presents a mosaic of singular contrasts, of widely opposite natures and fortunes; but this thwarting of the Minister's good schemes—Lena eloped with the "fast-looking young man," and 'Walter,' passed over to this gentleman of sport and pastime—would seem to be specimens of those freaks of destiny which do sometimes unaccountably controvert the best of purposes. "When in doubt, win the trick," says Hoyle, and without defending the course adopted by Mr. Elsynge, it may, at least, be attributed to the impetuous and impulsive decision that brooks no deliberation over a project. He was accustomed to instant resolution, and rarely hesitated in fulfilling his plans. With master-strokes a situation may be touched off in a few lines; leagues of landscape dwell in a poet's sentence; the acme of living according to Mr. Elsynge's views consisted in condensation and immediateness; the trouble of a pause, the worry of a wait, the weakness of indecision were all contrary to his ethics and opposed to his principles. "Lessons are in diamonds, which the more closely cut the more varied and brilliant is their phasis." Mr. Elsynge's emotions would never be aroused by the cunning charm of elegant utterance, but they were fully exercised by the poetry and pathos of this bird-like creature, with wings pinioned.

Mr. Elsynge was no lover of the luxurious creations of the

French poets, stealing upon one like some gorgeous Watteau-fantasie of by-gone days, nor of the bold and pleasant idyls of the German, laden with legend, and tuned to tradition; nor of the golden conceptions of the Italians, sumptuous with sun, and fragrant of vineyards; it was some such Saxon poem as breaks upon one with flashes of sunshine in summer lanes, flushed with flowers, sweet with winds of woodland ways, and musical with trilliug of birds, with humming of insects, with glad laughter of cotters' children. Moreover he was to be captivated with stronger stuff than rose leaves, and bound with other fetters than blonde and brown threads of sheaved tresses; the perfume of his life was not the distilled essence of the boudoir, but the fresh, cool aroma of seas, the incense of garden-reaches, the low bloom hovering in corridors of the dragon fly amongst the rush, the fragrance of dead forest leaves; and had he come upon some beautiful wayside child looking up at his mare with half-timid, half-wild admiration, he would have taken her up beside him for a canter over the heath, quite unruffled by any trouble of considering the thing beforehand, and all undisturbed as to the opinion of Uriah Sticky and his class. And this pretty wanderer and wayfarer,—

> "Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on the cheek,"

charmed him as he had never been charmed before, she seemed to fill a vacancy long felt in his life, and to hold forth promise of companionship as freshly new as it was innocent.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MINISTER'S GOOD WORK.

Mr. Garland's office of mediator and peace-maker did not stop with the good work done in Yorkshire; he was quite aware one must adjust both sides to produce uniformity, and, immediately after leaving Cheffinger Abbey, he returned, as he promised, to Sleperton. Great was his mortification and sorrow upon hearing what had befallen 'Walter,' and to discover Lena had been taken away; it seemed to upset everything, and counteract the efforts so perseveringly made with the hope of uniting the scattered family. Things often do wear this irritating and unhealthy-looking aspect, when, after all, they are but working in perplexity and shadow for good. He did not stop to be discouraged, but set to work. Nothing was to be gleaned from Mrs. Vincent beyond the comment, in her own very charming manner, that Lena would, she feared, come to some bad end. That young lady having certainly been taken off to a distance, and, as he believed, to Yorkshire, he turned his attention to the one remaining, taking Lady Helen into his confidence, and with every delicacy and tenderness, disclosing that which moved the haughty lady to softer feeling and quivering sensibility, rendering her almost human. But even then, true to her character she raised as an obstacle the life the child must have led in the unfortunate period preceding the accident. To take to her heart a little circus girl, albeit a lost daughter, was so exceedingly out of the course of family and polite experience, that her ladyship revolted at the notion; but the indefatigable Minister, who hated this principle above all,

discoursed with such sensible yet unoffending tact, and made so powerful an appeal to her feelings, that she consented to accompany him to the mansion of the man of many virtues, there to see the poor little sufferer. Mr. Garland believed the sight of this pretty defenceless one would prove a more powerful argument than anything he could say. Elmore Elsynge, Esq., received his distinguished visitors with affable ease. It was only the day before that Mrs. Elsynge had expressed a hope, when talking with her grandson, that the owner of the Grange at Hawkingdean, then staying in Sleperton, would, upon some pretext or other, pay them a visit. Mrs. Elsynge had heard of the old moat (she kept a record of all the ancient dwellings where ponds, moats, or stagnant water of any considerable extent existed), and conceived the idea that the frogs fattening in its luxuriant preserves must be of a finer order, and worth ingrafting upon her own superb stock. Thus Mr. Garland was received with especial favour, and Mr. Elsynge was thinking to himself how best to persuade him into a similar visit to Froggypond, when the Minister introduced Lady Lindon and opened his business, upon which the heir at once began to look grave. It was an attempt to steal a march upon the treasure his countrymen and women had placed in his possession, and by all the laws of the Medes and Persians relating to testimonials, he did not see it.

The speaker proceeded with caution; he explained satisfactorily, in confidence and as between gentlemen, that this young lady was the daughter of Lord and Lady Lindon, and entered with minuteness into the incidents connected with the treachery of the woman with whom their child had been placed. He dwelt upon her ladyship's feelings, and left it to Mr. Elsynge's gallantry and honour. Mr. Elsynge bluntly said he didn't see that his honour had much to do with it; but as his feelings were appealed to, Lady Lindon was at liberty to see her child, and as soon as she might be removed, to have her taken to the Manor House. Mr. Elsynge did not expose his annoyance; he accepted the inevitable with the grace usually displayed by gentlemen of his position, and summoned his housekeeper to accompany Lady Lindon upstairs. Mr.

"Her white hand trifling with those short boy-curls."—PAGE 483.

Garland took up a book at his elbow, it was the "Frogs" of ARISTOPHANES. "*A present to dear Elmore, on his birthday, from his affectionate Grandma.*" Mr. Elsynge, leaning against the door, asked the visitor if he played billiards? No, he did not play billiards. How did he think the weather was looking? He thought the weather promised very favourably. He believed Hawkingdean was an easy drive from Lewes, did Mr. Garland ever go to Lewes Races? No, Mr. Garland did not go to Lewes Races. At which point a neighbour made a morning call, to the great relief of Mr. Elsynge. A light luncheon was served, the Minister taking a glass of Burgundy with much pleasure, for he was exhausted; he did not become impatient—he believed an affecting interview was taking place above—but he became weary of the conversation of the two gentlemen, upon horses, dogs, matches, engagements, and sport generally, then upon French actresses, Italian singers, Spanish dancers, and other foreign matter.

And upstairs, the stately lady was overcome by that sweet, patient face, engraved upon her heart from often looking at the picture where it was copied with exquisite truth to life. Affected to tears at thus meeting her little one lost for so long, she could but kneel by the bed, her white hand trifling with those short boy-curls, her diamonds sparkling through the net-work of blonde silk; so different to the cold, repelling, and imperious lady-mother in the long-ago of dreamy memory; so different, that 'Walter' rested blissfully, almost afraid to break the spell and bring back the haughty Empress of her earlier years. At last she timidly asked, "And you are really my own dear Mamma? And you are going to love me, and take me to live with you? Tell me so, it makes me feel well and most happy!"

"It is true, my dear, so soon as it may please God to make you well, when the removal will not harm you!"

Then, very content, the little one smiled, thinking how soon she would get well. But Lady Lindon was seriously alarmed for her restored one and was unwilling to leave her, and later on in her chamber at the Manor House realized Madame de Staël's words, "Oh, what would become

of a mother, trembling for the life of her child, if it were not for prayer!" In the solemn night-time the thought of that patient face kept her company, and she saw her child still, chaste with the shapely symmetry of one that lives in marble, with that light on the brow that is born of the soul. Can any interpret the difficult and beautiful tenderness which is a blended rhythm of love and regret? Devotion is blazoned on the shield of history, and heroism lives upon its page, but who chronicles regret, or takes measure of remorse? The bard would harp for ever over heroics and lovers, but regret hath no time, and its resonance is but a weary echo. What *trouvère* hath ever sung the lyric of a love clasped in a fixed regret? There is love that suffers and is strong, that esteems coronets and crowns as toys, that lives and dies its own monument, God and the angels its witness: and there is love that is not denying, that is haughtily cold, fed of the ashes of some grim past, the ideal of desolate sovereignty. And when this sensitive lady thought of that daughter lying in the house of a stranger who had paid a price for her ransom from bondage,—

> "With childhood's starry graces lingering yet
> I' the rosy orient of young womanhood;
> And eyes like woodland violets newly wet;
> And lips that left their meaning in her blood!"

she truly realized the bitterness of a great humiliation. Holding up the light the better to look upon the portrait in her chamber, it seemed that she detected greater loveliness than she had ever done before: that glimpse of the face in life lent soft toning, and recollection weaving its charm about this picture, she told herself never such beauty had met her gaze before. So she grew to be proud of it, and to be proud of it was a distinct advance on her favour. That too highly strung instrument, her heart, was vibrating, a sweeter melody awaking from slumber on its strings, she was trembling and surely womanly. She placed the light down before the picture amongst *cristalleries* of Clichy and Baccarat, and she went to the table, where those simple treasures brought to her of old by tiny hands were more silently eloquent than ever, and she was lost in

thought; back to a time when a vision now and then crossed her fancy of what might be—a handsome, dark-eyed son, with wild curls clustered where she would long in future days to see the circle of laurel, ancient wisdom and the undying poetry of Athens his honour and delight. It had passed, and she had not taken to the girl instead, her proud desire was thwarted, and she never forgot; but now, the dreamy still-faced girl, with the pensive light in her large eyes, and quiet calm on the brow where a glory seemed to fall through the pale golden hair, this girl bade fair to woo infinite tenderness, win great love! Lady Lindon, like others with whom the child came in contact, *could not* remain insensible to that nameless charm which won the interest and sympathy of all.

Conflicting emotions were certainly breaking down that barrier of cold and proud exclusiveness which she had raised between herself and others. The communication made by Mr. Garland moved her as nothing had ever done before. To realize herself in company with her children—no longer alone—with something to live for—possibly loved, although she doubted much whether ever forgiven—all this presented such strange and unthought of possibilities, and was so consummate a fulfilment of the yearning experienced throughout, that she was shaken as women are when confronted by tremendous and imminent issues for good or for bad. This was for good; undeserving, guilty but penitent, she was yet to be made happy, and the consciousness of this helped to subdue her defiant reserve. It was no sudden change: the breaking up of ice is a gradual process; and so it was with this woman lately so strong, Roman-voiced, stately, proud. When majestic and powerful, one could not approach nearer than the lowest step of her daïs, dazzled by the glitter of her gems and great flood of gold, looking in vain for one little point of tender blue for relief from the blaze of splendour—all the anguish of unrelieved colour, the clash of a might of music, and not one small cool pearl, one soft low note. Now it is different, the blue and the pearl, the lower note, and a broken pride that is a loftier grace. Already meditation has become a happiness;

> " Thoughts that poets fling upon
> The strand of life, as driftweed after storms,"

are grouping and gathering together beautifully. Anon her soul will revel in those quiet yet intense joys of motherhood, in the true perfection of which the isolation through pride becomes impossible.

The splendour of her house palls upon her now, so do aspects change. It is gorgeous with cunning of rare colour, and grand with the glow of great lands of the East, but she almost sighs for more simplicity, and some quieter hues, shadowy and calm. Our inner self is so in or out of harmony with its surroundings, the thrilled soul is influenced instantly by colour, or its absence, to agitate and wound or to depress. The era of the Cactus had passed, the time had come when—

> " Doves made sweet moaning, and the guelder rose
> In a great stillness dropp'd, and ever dropp'd,
> Her wealth about her feet."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MAJESTY OF FORGIVENESS.

While the train of incidents described were passing in one place, equally as interesting an understanding was being brought about elsewhere. Willie Arden, upon arriving at home with his precious charge, accompanied by her faithful maid, although strongly tempted to invite her to be the guest of his father, was yet so nice upon points of etiquette that he preferred to take her on at once to St. Aubyn. They reached the House upon the Cliff not long after the departure of the Minister, and found her guardian, if not exactly prepared for the meeting, less obdurate. The return, in fact, was well-timed; had it been left until the morning, as Mr. Willie was at first tempted, events might have resulted differently. The recluse was pleased to see good Martha Saxe in attendance, and to know the unbroken journey had been taken straight to himself. And had not views, possibilities, and passions, been forcibly turned from their still, deep channel! Ay, she might come back now and welcome. It would afford opportunity for the performance of that upon which the mediator had so strongly, and, as it seemed to his lordship, so mercilessly, set his heart. Lady Lindon yearned for the recovery of her children, and to be told by his own lips that she was forgiven; she should be told so, and the pledge should be his taking her child, and himself uniting them. "My ancestors could not have done more," he murmured; then added bitterly, "and forgetful of the past, and of myself, Helen and Lena will be happy, very happy." But he did not sufficiently fathom the nature of either: they would not forget.

But oh, he was not half cured yet; the sight of her recalled so much, revived such happy memories. Time might tone down the rebellion, would do so, but while it lasted he suffered. Yet he did not fail in courtesy, and with a grace singularly his own thanked the young man kindly. If anything could make up to him for any aggrieved feeling he might harbour, it should have been the child's fervour of love and gratitude upon being received again. Lena was indeed joyous beyond measure, and, as she said to him, had come back loving him as never before. That slightly clouded the young man's brow, and did not lift any particular cloud from St. Aubyn's, but he could not help feeling the sincerity that prompted the assurance, and there is much in sincerity even under the most untoward circumstances.

"I shall be pleased if you will remain our guest this evening, Mr. Arden!"

How magnanimous he could be now that the splendid illusion had vanished, and that to which he had clung failed to sustain him!

His nature was not like the common natures of the world; isolation had fostered the idealism of the love that had atoned for the terrible grief of earlier years, and the passion had been one for which there is no measurement. And now the loss was so utter, so tremendous in its complete destruction and shattering of the tender fragile fabric, he could dispassionately extend hospitality to the young man who had in that happy past caused him many a pang, could calmly anticipate the double anguish of an interview with his wife, and the yielding to her of this long priceless treasure.

And if an evening's unalloyed pleasure was a reward for constancy in memory and chivalry in conduct, then was Willie Arden abundantly rewarded, for he passed, as he told himself when looking in the toilet-glass afterwards, the very happiest evening of his life. Miss Lena's adventures, while sobering her a little, and inducing a thoughtfulness that sat very charmingly, had not despoiled her of those innocent, guileless, kitten-like ways and movements that were of themselves so fresh and attractive; and while every old fascination was thus

brought up before St. Aubyn with a vividness that blanched his cheek by its agony, it, on the other hand, flushed the cheek of Willie Arden with the warmest glow delight ever lends. It was an evening both he and the girl looked back upon: a link, connecting the dawn of love with its meridian.

A few nights after this, time of the border-line between spring and summer, when the world was fresh with renewed beauty, and the bloom was vivid with an outburst of delicate colour, and sweet with reviving clouds of delicate fragrance; on an evening towards the end of May, warm, balmy, odorous, the country seeming to welcome unto herself by every blandishment and wooing charm, pleasing to the several senses, the land outspread with an array impressive to the dullest soul; singing birds, flowering plants, elegant foliage, an aroma perceptible at no other season of the year; clear, dazzling, blue and white above; gambolling, leaping, skipping, frisking of animals and children; soft music and song, and tender minstrelsy everywhere; graceful play of insects in the mellow air; slant beams of gold touching up the old masonry of the Manor House until it resembled some cunning painting, the last flood of glorious light bathing all the garden until it presented a Watteau-like surrounding to the mansion; and on the quaint, red-bricked village, flowers everywhere, and the village green new carpeted with a brighter turf; whereon stood the Lord of the Manor, returned and contemplating the fair scene with mingled feelings of pain and gladness. With him Lena, and as the sunbeams fell upon her blown and careless hair, and the ruby tint in the sky seemed to centre in a glow upon her cheek, he, looking upon her and upon the spring-time spectacle, was moved with emotion, and, taking her hand, walked more quickly towards his home.

A man came from amongst the trees, near the house; it was Reuben Smith, the Bailiff; he removed his hat and stood with profound respect before his Lordship.

"Good evening, Master Smith, I am glad to find you looking well, and the old place seems home-like after all!"

"My duty to your Lordship, and thank ye I'm well an' hearty; and the place ain't changed this ten year, as you see!

I've done by you as though to give account at any minute you might come home. Some o' th' neighbours is contrary, and the mill ain't what it was; if there's corn there's no wind, and if there's wind there's no corn, and it's hard grinding a livin' out of it all, but thanks to your Lordship I've had the farms to look to and it's kept things going somehow or other."

"And the tenants—all well, I hope?"

"All on 'em, not one have ailed a day sin' your Lordship's bin gone!"

"I am glad to hear it; health, Master Smith (next to peace of mind), is the greatest of all blessings."

"Grist to the mill, some says, but I don't know but your Lordship is right! Very doubtful whether the peace o' mind will come to anybody in this world though!" Reuben moodily went on his way, while the Lord of the Manor stood by the great gates looking back on the village. One and another of the cottagers standing by their garden railing, looked wonderingly across the Green, hardly certain whether their eyes deceived them, or whether it was indeed the long-absent Lord, and from one and another the strange news spread, and they thought the world was approaching its end surely, wonders were so many!

He passed through the great gates into the garden and they saw no more of him that evening.

He made no commotion by knocking at doors and ringing bells, but walked in quietly, unannounced; he knew well the apartment which was wont to be the favourite with his wife, and, leaving Lena in the library, went to it, with a firmness and heroism full of dignity. She was there, in the midst of her barbaric splendour, imperial as of old, girt strangely with subtle colour, low upon luxuriant cushions; a long stretch of the skins of mighty beasts; broad columns flanked with malachite, chased and locked with gold. Lion-basins, Pompeian, bronze and gold, filled with scented waters or beautiful flowers; tawny magnificence that might have been the glory of enchanted halls of the Libyan desert; carven plinths where the lotus—emblem of beauty—seemed the presiding floral symbol whether in wood or stone; here and there curious characters

oriental, flashing some snatch from Eastern poems, talismanic, mystic as are those on the reputed scimitar of Solomon. Gleaming birds secured by silver chains fluttered amongst pomegranate-trees growing in great jars by the window; ornamental boxes glowing with the golden Persian lily; marble tanks wherein gold fish, which she daintily sported with after the method of the Empress of Jehan-Guire, who encircled her favourites with fillets of gold. Suspended from the ceiling were weighty curtains of snowy velvet, lined with an exquisite ruby silk, looped by thick cord of gold; at intervals were long white tassels seen but in the Indies, made of the hair taken from the tails of white oxen in Scinde: to each tassel was attached a tinkling bell of gold, and the fluttering of the birds or the soft air coming from the garden through the open window kept these in continual motion. Upon pedestals were contrivances of amber, innocent conceits deftly shaped by swarthy beauties, who in their land sing that amber is a concretion of the tears of birds; alabaster flagons gorgeous with the blood-red amaranth, in line, at intervals, so placed as to relieve the tawny overweight of brown and yellow splendour: lower than these and circling them, in symmetrical alabaster vases, were Cashmere roses of astonishing colour and rare odour; over the floor was outspread a dense purple, thick pile carpet: at uniform distances were snowy rugs, every rug being bordered with massive fringe of gold and lined with amber silk. A circular richly-chased ewer of coloured marble was stationed in the centre of the apartment and was a receptacle for the lotus, whose red blossom seemed to sovereign the rivalry around: lower than this and encircling it were lesser ewers of corresponding design, wherein the blue lotus lent much needed relief; lower yet than these, lying upon the clear water of a white marble bath surrounding the whole, there were blue water-lilies, their grateful hue in conjunction with the pellucid depth assisted the relief. Drinking at this pool was a pet goat of Tibet, its collar encrusted with gems; by its side was a pile of purple cushions, upon them reclined a girl of surprising loveliness who attracted his Lordship's attention immediately: a book, a portfolio of engravings, a lute and mandolin, and fanciful needle-work were

around her, and a truly pretty picture with its romantic surrounding was presented. Lady Lindon arose with much sad majesty, and a deadly calmness that moved him to the soul. Mr. Garland had in some degree prepared her for this, but all the preparation in the world would not nerve her for thus looking upon his face, so worn, so handsome still, so livid with agony of the moment. He took her hands with a kind, forgiving, considerate manner, that assured her of his desire to convey how completely he absolved her. Wistfully looking into his grand face, courting the eyes whose eloquence she had never cared to fathom, for the glance of pardon that might perchance give promise of a full forgiveness, hanging as it were upon the very grasp of the hands holding hers during that first firm unshaken greeting, seeming to live ages in the brief suspense between that movement and the word, gleaming with her embroidery of topaz, gems, and gold, queen-like in raiment of queens, haughty yet, but with it all, sad, yearning, quivering; allowing herself to be slowly guided thence, walking as a queen might walk from her throne to some quiet chamber where she would confront time and eternity and lay aside her majesty, becoming very woman in penitence and supreme humility. He could not talk amidst that splendour, but led her to the duskier room where her portrait, painted long since in the days of his belief, hung above the chimney-piece.

"A few, unreserved words, Helen: there should be no witness to our understanding—reconciliation if you will—save One who witnessed the solemnity of the compact and of my truth when I took you to be my wife." She bowed her head, then with faint utterance said,—

"You use the word 'reconciliation,' it is your supreme pity which dictates its use: you know there is heinous crime and sin upon one side, and aggrieved honour, poisoned faith, upon the other. I shrink not from a plain statement of the position, I have had plainly to state it so often to myself. No; reconciliation may follow! Now it is pardon!"

"And you are pardoned, Helen. I come purposely to tell you so."

The assurance confirmed the hope his generous clasp of the

hand had thrilled her with. For a moment she became faint, and leaned tremblingly to the wall, where once he too had rested in sore pain; and he suffered now, she was so sadly beautiful, and he thought of what might have been: but there was no love left, its very embers were quenched.

He gently took her hand, leading her from that stricken posture, supporting her with firmness in which there was no shadow of trembling: so to a chair by the window; a tiny gleam of red from the setting sun stole upon its back, where the carved and painted shield of a long unsullied line seemed to blind him. His mother had often sat in that same place, talking of the glory of a spotless ancestry, of the crowning reward of all chivalry—a faithful consort, one to add fresh lustre to the honour, one to join the traditions of stateliness and grace. It caused him to wince with sharp and sudden pain, and for an instant he doubted the reality of his destiny it seemed so cruel.

He stood beside her; she leaned an elbow on the table and her brow fell to her shapely hand, and far outspread in line with her was the sweep of splendid robing. He would not look upon that queenliness, upon those fair proportions, saw alone the sorrowful face downcast, the attitude of resigned repentance; and he spoke very tenderly, so tenderly it set her quivering, and it seemed harder to bear than reproaches.

"One solemn moment of our lives, dear Helen, was when you left me, taking our child; another, now, when I return to you, bringing your child, *not mine!* There is no special God to try the causes and results of such solemn moments, it is the Providence who smiled upon our union and would have blessed it. In His grieved sight to-day I stand in the old home, very dear to me, Helen, and most for those who have gone before: but I shall revisit the hallowed spot no more. I have lived dead to you and to the world, and shall still live on, unknown, unknowing, only a bitter memory left to me: isolated, the fierce elements—kinder far than my race—for sole companionship: eyried as eagles eyrie—face to eternity, fed of the furious storms, aloof from all gentle things, and enthroned above wreckage, turmoil, and the strife of tempests.

I have come to look upon this face again, once more (raising it, drenched with her tears, so softly she could not resist); so sad a face, it will haunt me there; but I brought some of our northern sunshine with me (here his voice trembled), to restore the smiles that were ever too few upon so royal a face; and with your children, longed-for, I am told, great happiness may yet be yours. My pardon I brought in person, that heard from my lips you might rest content with, feeling its depth of sincere good-will. I have brought no ill-feeling here with me to-day, shall carry none hence, and if I know that you are happier for this, that life and love finds all it needs in intercourse with those restored to you to-day, I shall be content; I may say, since I speak as one who will be heard no more, that greater content will be mine than if I knew you returned to Society, whose sovereign you rightfully were, but are no longer. We shall live distinct, retired lives, but neither need be profitless; your children; my—my books, and art, and the what-not wherewith the lonely edify themselves. Ghosts of old memories will sometimes trouble me, but I will lay these, God helping me, in giving aid to those beaten, battered ones, bruised by storms and rocks. You and the delicate twain will think of me at such times, and I will think of you and them."

She could not bear much more, and when the proud sad tone had ceased and there was silence in the room, she was confronted by all he had said, rising stark and weird before her, remembered every word, vivid and fire-like, and her eyes were hot, tears dried, she could no longer weep, but with wistful agony looked up, taking his hand, feeling the palm throbbing like her own heart.

"You shall not go from here," she said, "it is your home, not mine; and if you will permit it, my children shall accompany me to Darrell Abbey."

"No; remain where you are, or go whither you will; I shall return to the seclusion of my out-of-the-world retreat."

"Do you know that I was told you were dead?" asked with pathetic quivering of the lip.

"Yes; I told you myself. It is the truth."

She shook her head.

"And I mourned as widows mourn for dead husbands, loving them. I mourned as though there had been no shadow from the altar to the grave."

He only bowed; the mourning for one's death is so little consolation.

"Let us join the girls," he said abruptly, for he was beginning to feel too much at home, and it would not do.

They found them like doves, nestling and cooing away as though there were neither world nor mortal beyond their Pompeian chamber. Lena, used to petting goats with other creatures, divided her caresses between the gemmed beauty from Tibet and her sunny-curled half-sister. Life promised henceforth to be a happy dream for the pretty pair, and perhaps in the opinion of both they had been so very much awake of late they might well afford to dream awhile.

Lord Lindon's emotion became more marked upon thus discovering so exquisite a picture. He went to the window; it was the twilight of distant woods in view beyond the garden —the dear old garden of his boyhood—it seemed softened, while the lowered hues lent dim misty beauty, like some lone isle of fairy world revisited in dreams. The circle of lights beyond the Green just glimmered here and there between the trees. It was all so peaceful, and some bird's vesper stole down on it with so sweet a benediction, he asked why man's heart should be thus distracted when all the world seemed hushed and still. He heard quick breathing beside him, and, looking round, saw his daughter, come with her winning confidence to tell of her heart's long love for her lost Papa: and he sat in the window, with her by him, looking on the young face, learning it. Beautiful language was writ thereon, such as suffering—which purity and delicacy refines, not makes gross—leaves the imprint of while adding one other charm. She stood at his knee—child-like and wooingly—the action made his heart bleed, for it recalled the similar attitude by another, so often a fond delight; at the same time, somehow, this tended to heal, there was so grave a sweetness about it, such tender thought; it sank into his wounded heart, it bore full sympathy and feeling, it was fragrant with love treasured

and growing up to the finest passion ever moving a human heart. Gently he wooed the story of her known to you, and heard how, while his flown bird was winging her flight from him, this poor toiler plodded on hopefully towards himself, cherishing a dim pictured ideal of him she sought, who when found was to be all in all to her, and it moved him mightily, it was so redolent of loving simplicity and devotion.

"And you have been praying to find me some day?" he asked softly. "Have looked to it as the end of all the wanderings?"

She gazed into his eyes lovingly, looked the answer with never a word, and he laid a hand lightly on the clustering boy-curls, idling thoughtfully with them, they were so unlike the tresses with which he had been wont to play. And Lena, nestling by her mother, saw the action with singular emotion, but neither spoke; her ladyship was too unstrung by the recent ordeal to display the interest thrilling her, she remained very quiet awhile until composed, straining to catch his low-breathed utterance, striving to intercept but one fond glance bestowed upon his child, and her heart sank to witness the warmer attention she gave to him; there had been no such smiles as those for her; when the girl's eyes had met her own, there had not shone upon her the rays of love making his face look lighter, and more happy than she had yet seen it, and Lady Lindon felt even grateful for that close nestling to her of the other.

Confidingly as a boy or girl stands at one's knee to unburden the heart of its sorrow she stood by him, piteous, beautiful. "Would I had known of this!" he said, much affected. "How much we are indebted to our friend the Minister!"

"Perhaps I might never have seen either you or Mamma had it not been for him."

"And now you are going to settle down quietly and make up for all, in this old home?"

"No!" Her eyes were open wide with awakened enthusiasm at the new plan in view, and his heart was thrilled when she hurriedly continued, "Lena and I have been talking, she has

told me all of her story not told to me before, and cried when thinking how lonely you would be. 'If Papa will have you, dear, do you go back with him,' she said to me; 'try to console him for the loss of myself, and love him as I have loved him, still love him! Your sweet ways and gentleness will charm him, and in time,—in time he will be as happy with you as he used to be with me; more so, for I was always unruly and a source of anxiety!'"

The recluse turned his head away, his whole frame was shaken, the solicitude of his late treasure and the recollection of old times affected him terribly. But the thoughtfulness of Lena, extravagant as the project seemed to him, offered release from the utter loneliness his isolation entailed. And his heart was warming fast to this fragile, gentle creature, for whom he had so grieved when stolen from him in her early childhood. In the sadly beautiful face that so impressed every one, he met the lineaments of a race distinguished for beauty; those sensitive nostrils almost breathed upon Lely's canvases in the gallery, the eyes were the eyes of his stately mother living again to comfort him.

"But I may not take you from your mother's care, think of her as well as me!"

"I am afraid I am thinking of myself most of all; I shall be happier with you! I have learnt to be very candid," she added, with a faint smile; and then with a burst of confidence, "you cannot think, how I dreaded lest, when I discovered my father, I should find also that another filled his heart. I had a sort of vague presentiment of this, but now it seems there will yet be room for me, that I shall come in after all!"

"But how will you like a nest cradled high upon wild crags, with furious winds only for lullaby?"

"I have had none other," she answered slowly, pale at the recollection.

"How like the monotony of so uneventful an existence?"

"It is what I have longed for; quiet, and peace, and rest!"

"No fresh faces to please and distract attention?"

"One: yours: is all sufficient; and I shall love it so!"

This was said with passionate ardour, indicating both the sincerity and how intensely it had been longed for.

"Then you shall come!" And, with his arm reassuringly around her, he drew her close to him with the half-convulsive movement so significant of suffering. When near to that heart the child knew a joy the like of which she had never known before.

Shades deepening without warned him it was time to depart if he would quit Seaborough by the evening train, and this for manifold reasons he preferred doing.

"We have been engaging in an innocent compact," he said quietly, walking towards Lady Lindon hand in hand with his daughter.

"I can guess it," she said rising, "and my selfish feelings may not impair an arrangement that will be productive of much happiness."

"Thank you; our girl shall visit you and Lena at intervals." And that concession she thought gracious and full of feeling. "If you can spare her now, it will save the necessity of my returning here, it is unwise to give the people food for talk." This brought it very close, it seemed more than she could assent to, so soon to part with her, but she suppressed all outward emotion, and slightly bowed acquiescence, clinging to that promise of his. More spontaneous and unfettered was the remonstrance of Lena and Helen; clasped hands, tearful eyes, and caresses told of how they saddened; and then Lena thought also of him, and checked the sorrow, cheerfully looking to their future meeting.

With an adieu of calm, unruffled firmness, Lord Lindon took leave of her ladyship; the farewell of Lena was also gone through with, by which time the firmness had given way, and dejected he quitted the well-loved home, looking back on it with moist eyes, and clasping hard the little hand in his.

Then they set their faces northwards. Companions these thenceforth.

She had looked for this; it was what would have been had she not in earlier days met with that hard fate. So they comforted one another.

CHAPTER XLII.

WITH VISORS DOWN.

The Minister's study: The Grange: Night. Mr. Garland writing; his looks troubled and careworn. A deathlike stillness; all of the household having retired to rest. There is that sullen, mysterious hush which forebodes coming ill, when we are unable to account for the weighing down of the spirits, and receive warning of imminent peril. But the Minister's face had never been graver and more thoughtfully majestic than on this night, alone in his study, calm, composed, prepared for battle. It was known to him that he had the World, hitherto at his feet, arrayed against him in bitter warfare; the Flesh, for which he had so often sacrificed himself, had revealed itself his perjured ally, a subtle traitor; the Devil, with whom he had struggled until faint, was become the marshaller of forces of stupendous influence, to blast his character and reputation. One against legions; no wonder he looked grave; was solemnly in earnest!

He knew himself to be toppling upon the pedestal, that the lies set floating were in the current of common talk; the grand unsullied ministry the garment for vulgar soiling, his lofty life the subject for ribald insult, his self-denying devotion held up as hypocrisy. He knew it. Members leaving the church, absence of communicants, coolness of the office-bearers, turning away of friends, pointing of the public, significant removal of his books from the shop-windows of the town, respectful intimation from his Brighton housekeeper of her wish to resign her duties, and cancelling of an engagement to lecture. Ay, it is soon done; yet thus far it was but rumour,—a brave

defiance, a challenge daring and heroic as any attributed to the classical champions of Christendom—and honour might be saved. He was not fighting in the dark; he knew his foes, and verily they were powerful, that threefold combination. But he was neither intimidated nor overwhelmed, for, after all, he felt that he had been waging war with Hydra from the beginning. A man of this stamp, who could enter so fearlessly upon the most open and exposed of all public relationships, with a mighty and tenacious purpose at heart, would not abandon the field, though scarred by many wounds, nor ever yield but with his life.

"It has hitherto been a contest, Mr. Barnard, at a safe distance; you have brought it close, perhaps it is as well, we shall finish it the sooner." He spoke aloud, his hand upon his brow, his face bowed low. The speech was answered. The time for which his enemy had waited had arrived! Having entered unheard, by way of the moat and secret passage, he had been contemplating the Minister with folded arms, haughty, determined.

"The sooner—this night!"

The Minister turned a degree colder. Looking wearily up,—

"This is something fresh; intrusion into my very house and private apartment."

"I have not the word 'Privacy' written on my notes, Lionel Travers, where you are concerned. The intimacy between us is too delicate to admit of any such barrier."

"Nay, but God forbid there should be any intimacy between us, sir! Our paths lie distinct and wide apart."

Both were collected, and both were coldly courteous.

"They cross to-night! I've a little outstanding account, which, if you please, we'll settle up."

Impatiently indicating a chair, the Minister laid down his pen with characteristic precision. "I am ready to hear anything you have to say, sir."

"You probably imagined, until seeing me that day in the chemist's shop, that I was conveniently absent in another hemisphere, or elsewhere?"

"I thought it more likely you were safely in the hands of the police."

Mr. Barnard bowed. "Disdainful as of old, sir; your clerical life has not sweetened your disposition."

"Towards you, no! The minister is yet a man, and by his manhood loathes the villainous miscreant now in his presence."

"Steady does it, reverend sir, or by jingo you'll make me speak my mind!"

"Do so. If truthfully, it will be the first time in your life."

Mr. Barnard looked at his antagonist with leisurely admiration.

"You'll die fighting."

"I shall die at my post."

"A defensive one just now, eh, Mr. Westley Garland?"

"Always a defensive one; it is the stationary position of a minister of the Gospel."

"Or the minister of anything else, I take it. I've been in a state of siege and defence all my life. But allow me to explain the purport of my trip to Hawkingdean. Business, sir! I'm all business! You have, no doubt, been surprised and gratified that there has been no attempt at interference with you in your present avocation? Don't interrupt me; because you have, any man would. I credit you with the common feelings of humanity, notwithstanding your late exalted position: observe the 'late,'—it exists no longer, or won't to-morrow if we don't come to terms, for your hold upon the *ecclesiastici* is ticklish, sir, or I'm no miserable sinner. Your progress has been watched with keen interest by those of your friends, who, standing aloof from you, have sympathized with your indefatigable perseverance in amassing treasure. I do assure you upon this matter we are in accord. This is the business I have come upon, to negotiate with a man of substance, sir, —a man of substance. I sojourn at the leading hostelry of this charming village. To simplify matters, you will hand over to me and the firm I have the honour to represent all moneys standing to your account in the Brighton and London Banks; you will then be at liberty to accept a curacy under one of our estimable Colonial Bishops; or, and this I com-

mend to your notice in consequence of your success amongst the heathen at home, as a missionary; with your enterprise you would do a large amount of good amongst the blacks."

"I have heard you out, sir—"

"No; I have not finished yet, but pray go on with what you were about to say."

"I do not know where your rapacity will end."

"With—your—all!"

"I should have thought the extent of my sufferings—the utter wreck of myself and home, the loss of every farthing, of honour, of my dear wife and child—would have satisfied even you."

"Excuse me, there you run on a false track; I am not despotic; nor of the school. The majority of persons, indeed, vote me an exceedingly pleasant person for a man of business; the impending transaction with yourself is purely a matter of business."

"There is no transaction pending with me, sir, nor is there likely to be. Your extortionate demand will be forgotten directly your odious presence is withdrawn."

"'Hard words break no bones,' as my grandmother said to me when she gave me a severe thrashing after swearing at me for an hour. You are, of course, aware of the ugly things the good people are saying of you? I can't tell whether true or false, but I do know human nature to be singularly frail. If, however, you've done all they say about you, all *I* can say is that you're an out-and-outer. Under these circumstances, a word I have it in my power to speak will settle Westley Garland, the sometime popular preacher, for ever. I have but to declare that he has been living and preaching under an assumed name, and to expose the antecedents of this twofold person, in order to lead to his uncommonly rapid exit. It is on the card that I do this, failing your compliance with the delicate request before named. I rely upon your good sense to avert this contingency."

"Which it will not, sir; you are at liberty to publish anything concerning myself that you please; such threats carry no weight; indeed, that you should threaten at all is a matter

of perfect indifference. I believe the English people regard a man's work before his name, and so long as he be known as *Christian*, that surname is sufficient warranty for their esteem. As to the rest, I am not sure but Lionel Travers will gain as many sympathizing friends as does his better self. Names are but husks, that drop off and grow again, renewing their little day according to the part we play. My reputation can be safely left to take care of itself, if worthy at all, slander will not hurt it."

How oppressively silent the room seemed between the intervals of their talking!

"Anticipating some such indifference to public opinion—a great mistake where a man holds the future in the hollow of his hand—I have taken steps to submit another argument; one that will carry greater weight. Your child is in my power and in safe keeping!"

The countenance of the Minister was convulsed with pain, and for an instant he did not reply. Then he said,—

"I am sorry for that, Noel Barnard."

"So am I; it's the only one thing I am tender about. It was, however, a politic step, and she has been well cared for. A man must be considerably worse than I am to harm one like her."

"I thank you. Up to this time I have thought you entirely without pity, but I suppose the acme of baseness is not yet exemplified."

"I should like you to know my lawyer. Should that worthy ever dissolve with me, he is specially retained for the Infernal Circuit; he's a useful man at keeping a concern together, very! My lawyer will do himself the pleasure of waiting upon you any time you may appoint for transfer of the cash, when also Miss Travers shall be at your disposal."

"You are very considerate! If I understand you aright, I am to beggar myself at your bidding, to recover my child?"

"And preserve your good name in your present field of action!"

"After which, I am expected to quit the country—in fact, leave you free to enjoy your spoil?"

"You put it with singular felicity, sir; at the same time with a slight disregard for the laws of politeness."

"I will introduce the laws of politeness to your notice now. You were once acquainted with a man named Beech, I believe?"

The Minister's eyes, scathing as the lightning, fixed his opponent. Barnard turned restlessly, then drew his chair closer to the writer's table, and looked at the stern, handsome face curiously.

"A man of that name was once in my employ."

"A closer union than that linked you, Noel Barnard; you were fellow-convicts at Swan River!—"

The long, thin face of the other became of a ghastly hue.

"From whence you escaped, in company with your comrade —both branded felons!"

He neither spoke nor moved; but, as though fascinated, his eyes never left the face of the Minister, who was sadly in earnest and calm; no shadow of exultation crossed his brow.

"Beech is dead; he died penitent; and I was happy to take his hand as I would that of a friend, not for the confidence made me on his death-bed, but because of that penitence which makes us all stand upon equal ground."

It was no news to Barnard that the man was dead. For his own safety's sake he had decided that to be necessary long ago; but that the Minister should have been with him in his dying moments so impressed the half gipsy with omen-like significance that he gloomily muttered,—

"Seems like fate, don't it?"

"Well, you are very likely to take that view of it; to me, it demonstrates the inscrutable, retributive judgment of God."

"Turning of the tables, eh, Lionel?"

His keenly-glittering eyes were all about him now; he was at bay at last.

"There is neither malice nor revenge in my heart. Out of the evil you wrought He brought forth good; for those who have suffered, very many have had cause to rejoice; for the pain inflicted upon my poor wife and child, another besides yourself is culpable, and as he hopes for pardon and extenua-

"His keenly glittering eyes were all about him now; he was at bay at last."—PAGE 504.

tion, so he now extenuates and pardons you. For the rest, you will restore every farthing of which you have wronged me, together with Eagle Hall, by consent of the owner, which I am satisfied you will have no difficulty in gaining; accompanied by a document, signed by you, declaring upon oath in the presence of two witnesses, professional gentlemen of high standing, that I have been the victim of conspiracy and fraud, and am innocent of all the misdemeanours imputed to me. You will cause my little girl to be brought to this house to-morrow. If the address of my wife is known to you, I require it at your hands. When this is all transacted, I will permit you to leave the country, safe and free to pursue your business in other lands, where, if conducted upon an honourable basis, there is no reason why you should not acquire a far larger fortune than you have ever succeeded in making by dishonest ability and accomplished villainy. You were commending our black brethren to my interest; I do not return the compliment, but I advise retirement to some Continent where your genius will have space to expand without injury to your fellow-creatures, and where character passes through transition-stages without risk to others during the process."

Mr. Barnard heard the Minister to the end of his address; it was impossible to tell the effect of the arraignment, the judgment, or the sentence; he betrayed no emotion, nor, beyond an extra sallowness of complexion, evinced any feeling. The Minister was accustomed to taking the law into his own hands; he now did so without any hesitation, and certainly without compunction. Justice represented a great deal to him, Mercy a great deal more; he would rather see this man, or a worse than this, leave the land, unharmed, with the possible prospect of amending his ways and performing some worthier part, than consign him to the merciless rigour of inexorable law; in other words, Westley Garland was in the service of Christ, not Cæsar; the source of his mercy was the source of his fearlessness, and in his struggle against sin he would overcome the World, subdue the Flesh, and send the Devil about his business.

The accused for some time made no reply; his mind was

busy with that period of his life recalled so abruptly, but which had flashed back to him with vivid outline. He saw again the manacled gang going forth, two and two, under the supervision of men armed with double-barrelled guns, who sat about on gates, or stumps, or clumps, all the time of the weary watch, while the convicts worked, road-making; sometimes with mocking ridicule of their weaponed guards, always with scowling, revengeful looks. No talking was allowed between the convicts, but, while working, they acquired a masonic language, and by sign conversed together unknown to their guards; sometimes, by practice of silent, moveless lips, interchanging looks of terrible significance, more fraught with ominous meaning than very long discussions; a speech of life and death invariably. By such means he and his comrade had planned a rush, and with mighty speed they sprang from the plot where they worked, leaping the scrub with giant bounds, and crouching flat while the first volley rattled above them; then up, clearing whole ridges of sand, and falling alongside while a repeated volley scoured the space; then up again, fleet, like the wind, crawling behind the sheltering mallee while a third volley pursued them; then off for the open country! Shouting of the followers becoming fainter, and finally ceasing; on for the barren level, miles and miles in extent, until the welcome shepherd's hut is reached, when they are safe. The grazier possessing the run has various huts used by his shepherds, two to each hut; these being away the greater part of the day with their flocks, leave at the hut a man called the hut-keeper, who cooks for them and helps in various ways, and who is the most lonesome and wretched being on the face of the earth, and more often than not an escaped convict himself; any way, he never fails to aid prisoners escaping; and when they are hiding by day in the bush, while the shepherds are away, bears to them provisions and drink, and furnishes them with coarse shirts and blouses in place of the convict garb marked with the red letters "P. S.," meaning Perth Stockade. Should pursuit follow them close, they are hidden away in the hollow of the blue-gum-tree, thousands of which are found in all directions, and

whose trunks would at one time have sheltered all Swan River Settlement. The timely help of the hut-man also extends to furnishing them with a billy and a pannikin, for the carriage of their provisions and water, and, where he can spare it, a small hatchet, known there as a tomahawk. Thus accoutred, the escaped convict follows the coast by day, the tea-tree and mallee scrub affording covers and, when resting, shade; by night he takes to the road, when proportionately greater progress is made, the sand-cliffs skirting the coast to some extent retarding it. Their greatest difficulty is in the matter of water; it is a thirsty route of many hundreds of sandy, desert miles; thus their journeying is timed, if possible, to camp each night by a pond (there called water-holes) or creek. Time is told by the Southern Cross at night, this and the whole body of planets there appearing of resplendent brilliancy. Often has Barnard recalled those night-marches when the white magellanic clouds tantalized them with silver promise, and it seemed as though the horrible pilgrimage never would be over; often has he heard in imagination the strange night-noises that used to render the way fiendish even to one of his nerve—the curlew, screaming like some woman in a paroxysm of pain, a creature never seen, but heard with a vengeance; the laughing jackass, a bird like our kingfisher, of a greyish brown, notorious for the most diabolical yell of hilarity known, the bird no one kills since it enjoys the reputation of destroying the snakes; the mopoke, an owl-like bird, with a note resembling that of a loud cuckoo in an echoing vault; and other odd sounds helping to make the nightly orchestra below the Southern Cross an uncommonly hideous one.

There was a terrible distance to go before Adelaide was reached. The encounters were few and far between; some poor wretch looking for work, with whom they unhesitatingly shared rations; a man searching for his horses astray in the bush; some shepherd tramping on for a fresh track; or a drove of stock horses, without shoes, the breed trained for hunting cattle in the bush, and upon the great plateau of grass-land; with them a couple of rough drivers, pushing on for distant farms,

who greeted the wayfarers with a jovial cheer natural to the Western Australian breeder: on their saddles before them were heavy hobbles—a strong iron instrument upon the handcuff principle, used for securing the horses, and which sent a cold thrill through the tramping comrades, hot as was the way. Several times they came upon a camp of blacks, the males being away hunting, leaving the old men and the females, called in that part "lubras," who received them kindly. Occasionally a team of two bullocks yoked to a dray, lumbered along the roadway. If they approached a hut it was with caution, and they never disclosed their business unless the "old lag" in charge made the sign known to them. Foot-sore and hungry they now possessed their liberty, and it atoned for all they suffered. Starve they could not, while the species of cypress known as the wild cherry grew on the way, its refreshing green a delight to the eye, its taste and sustenance pleasant and invigorating, and known from its poisonous facsimile by the singularity of its stone growing outside; while the great spreading box-tree shed its manna in their very path, which they mixed with wattle-gum, also plentiful, rolled into balls, stored in their pannikins, and ate when hungry. They also experienced the mortification of finding the apples —dazzling-looking fruit—which, when gathered, are only wood, setting Gipsy Noel, who had despoiled many an orchard in Old England, swearing finely.

Rivers were followed until they could cross on the sand, where, as is often the case, the bed was left dry under the severe drought.

Diversion they had also: a kangaroo drove would appear, two great ones in front followed by all the others very much according to size, a procession of leaping eccentricity that tickled Mr. Barnard's fancy immensely. The long lizard (called by the native the 'guana) speckled like the tree upon which it is found, amused them for hours. The lively insect known as the bull-dog likewise afforded some excitement; it is a long red ant, with a black head, and its sting is a mild edition of the wasp's. Occasionally a great black snake would draw itself sluggishly across their path. Once Barnard was

bitten, and his treatment thereof was characteristic of the man's cool clinging to dear life: opening a clasp knife, he cut out the bite, and in the notch filled gunpowder, then lighting a match, blew out the flame, placed the red end upon the powder, and with set teeth awaited the explosion which was to save his life. It is the common remedy in the West, and, of course, leaves the victim greatly exhausted; but tea and brandy, the favourite drink, and to be found in every hut, soon revives him.

It all came back to his mind while the Minister was speaking, all that horrible time of escape, and he could recall the delight with which the muddy roads and fences, wayside public-houses and outlying farms were reached, telling of Adelaide. And this Minister had it in his power to cause his return thither, or perchance to a more terrible place still, this man who had suffered agonies at his hands, whom he had beggared and defamed! True he bade him simply make common honourable restitution, mere ordinary fair reparation, and then go elsewhere and conduct his business upon an honest basis: but such clement, compassionate dealing, was so foreign to Noel Barnard's apprehension he failed to believe in it: and judging his opponent's principles by his own, had no doubt of its being a *ruse* to obtain an admission of the tremendous fraud perpetrated upon Lionel Travers, and the systematic attempt to defame the character of Westley Garland, having gained which, with the restitution of all, he would turn upon himself and make use of Beech's confession to wreak a revenge in full. "But no you don't, I've not finished with you yet, my friend!" Saying which to himself he rose, and standing, with deadly restraint upon any conflicting passions, he replied to the Minister's more than earthly leniency with cold cynical irony.

"So, you propose my leaving your country, in which it seems to me there was just room for one of us to govern, but not both! Well, I shouldn't break my heart over doing so, Mr. Westley Garland, for a more boggy, foggy, pestiferous potato-plot does not exist. In the cities one is smoke-dried as a haddock, and in the country one needs the

constitution of a rhinoceros! It is termed by your Exeter Hall friends 'a favoured land;' I could amend that panegyric by pronouncing it to be suffering from overcrowding, avariciousness, gluttony, vulgarity, superstition, bad manners, blighted affection, and tea-drinking. I could assert that it is overrun with monopoly, eaten up by immorality, and inhabited by old maids, doctors, publicans, and people supported by charity; falseness is upon the face of it, and every man jack rotten to the core; the women are all faithless, and the children story-tellers; the laundresses are dishonest, and commerce is a stark adulterator rampant wherever a line of bricks disfigures the landscape. For my part, with my tender conscience, I'd rather be the sovereign of the open and frank nomads, without tithe, tax, vote, vaccination, fires, explosion, smashes, colliery massacres, late hours, music halls, social vice, tinselled virtue, potted meats, and co-operative stores, than of a hundred such favoured lands, if I was obliged to take with them all the hollowness and sham, artificiality and hypocrisy, which go to make-up the glory here."

Having thus asserted his warfare with the institutions of civilization, the speaker, turning a more ghastly hue and with a change of tone to resolute defiance, declared war to the knife with the calm, wearied-looking man, with whom he was now having a hand-to-hand encounter.

"Before leaving your 'favoured land,' however, or your favoured company, I'll trouble you for the Beech-document, since you've introduced the question of documents. You who know what it is to feel uncomfortable with some such ticklish death-warrant in view, will readily imagine I cannot leave this place without it; you know me too well to doubt my meaning!" He had advanced a step nearer, the glare of a Cain in the cruel eyes, the teeth meeting with that ominous click which with Noel Barnard always meant mischief; his hand was gripped murderously, his breath came short as that of a beast of prey couching to spring upon the foe. Yes, Westley Garland knew the meaning, and experienced the awful feeling one so finely and delicately strung experiences when confronted by one who would take a life to secure future

safety. His was not the sinew of an athlete, but old exercises at Oxford were by no means forgotten, and he would defend himself with as determined courage from the attack of the murderer as from that of the slanderer. He arose also, very pale, but collected.

"The last time you threatened me, and indeed personally assaulted me, was in a dull Devon lane with a burly coward at your back, and my escape from you and your persecutions was by what might have been a watery death; but now I no longer fear your violence or dread your intrigues. I have extended a conditional pardon; you refuse these conditions, and demand that I should relinquish the evidence wherewith to-morrow I will brand you the accursed thief and liar that you are! Now, beware, or, by the Master I serve, I will lay you at my feet, and give your body to the moat you have used towards again effecting my ruin!"

The half-gipsy stood glaring upon this aroused lion with fierce disdain; the antagonist would have it settled, then, one way or the other? So be it! With an enraged spring and the grip of a giant he was upon fragile Lionel, who staggered, but with fine skill shook off and parried the talon-like clutch of those iron fingers. The study-table was knocked over, chairs were sent flying to the wall, the field thus gained afforded uninterrupted space for the awful struggle where dear life was the end fought for. An unseemly contention, of solemn issues, in that place of quiet study and thought, but its owner had no dictum which countenanced tamely submitting to be murdered in one's own harmless and inoffensive retreat. In the same degree Westley Garland would take particular care not to permit a repetition of this horrible breach of order. The combat raged fiercely, and, notwithstanding Barnard's terrific onslaught, it was not altogether in his favour; without miscalculating his opponent's strength, which was slender, he had not allowed for the mettle and force of a power inspired by just convictions, by righteous indignation, by anger approved and aided by Heaven. It was no stripling, no weak, spiritless man, but a being god-like and mighty for the time, with a grand wrath arming him with

a great defence. Once did the Minister, with an appalling effort, hurl his assailant from him and stand livid and gasping conqueror of the breathing time: the enraged and thwarted schemer was upon him again, and the struggle continued; even Westley Garland's patience under these conditions failed him, and strong passion convulsed the usually composed control: and this exhausted the energy, his strength was far spent. With the final essay of a gladiator he threw his opponent, while at the same moment Constance ran in, frightened at the disturbance, and she gazed with scarcely believing eyes at the spectacle of her friend in terrible perturbation, one knee upon the prostrate cause of the extraordinary commotion. Then suddenly all resentment left his soul, and saddened, regretful emotion took its place, her mute surprise and sweet countenance were so reproachful. He arose from the retributive attitude, saying calmly, "Your punishment be in Higher hands, you are free to quit this place as you entered it; I give you sixteen hours to supply what I required of you; should it not have arrived at my house in Brighton by one o'clock to-morrow, the confession I hold will be placed in the hands of the police!"

Sullen, moody, yet with a certain haughty grace, Barnard drew himself up to his full height and strode to the door, where in the dusk, gloomy as some swart, vanquished Arab, with the desert of Ishmael before him, but imperious to the end, he stood facing them; and there was an awful look upon the face Constance could not witness, and turned away.

"Your conditions shall be complied with, Lionel Travers, and we shall meet no more. A final word with my adieu—your wife has discovered you, and believes with others in your *amour*—ahem, present company prevents explanation, enough that she lies dangerously ill in the village. Adieu! If we meet again, it will be in a warmer clime—business demands my instant presence in India!"

And before the stricken and dismayed clergyman could move a step or utter a word his old enemy had gone,—to trouble him no more. But what a burden of disastrous communication he had left with them! It seemed for the moment

to paralyze and benumb to unconsciousness, so bewildering was the complete significance. It was Constance with her tender and still action at this crisis that revived and reassured.

"Do not be overwhelmed," she said; "of course you are in error, and they have seized upon the one error to wreak their design for ill. I have no doubt whatever that this misfortune *has* been brought about by design—your presence of mind now will alone serve us; it will not do to hasten and explain all, such impulse, painful though you will find it to resist doing so, would be perilous in the extreme: neither may I go to her under these delicate circumstances, until she has learnt how we are misjudged."

But then, that reality, her love, confronted poor Constance, and in confusion she ceased mid-way in her office of ministering one.

"Yes, you are right," said the Minister faintly, as coming out of a terrible dream: the events of the night had shattered him, before tried and very worn and weary; "we must use great care; I fear for the result. We need some gentle help just now, one to go to her whose presence would not affright, whose message could not distress. A depth of tender tact and soft thoughtfulness is wanted such as I only know yourself and Lady Guilmere to possess, and her ladyship is unknown to our poor darling; no stranger may intrude upon the sanctity of this great sorrow, exquisite though my friend's delicacy may be."

"I think I can suggest a happy proposal, admitting we can find little Ella; let her undertake this angel's mission; unless she has strangely altered, you could not have any one perform it better."

His face lighted up instantly, while he trembled at the near prospect of recovering his child.

"If Barnard fulfils my stipulations, Ella will be restored to me to-morrow."

"Then you have nothing to fear, and everything to hope."

And when Constance had retired, when silence reigned and a calm that seemed deathlike after that unseemly fray, the Minister could review at searching leisure the effect upon his

fortunes of this encounter. Daylight would surely dawn, and the dark cloud so long hanging over him be banished by the new light breaking with the morrow.

Long did he sit musing over that final blow, the keenest his enemy had administered; he had dreaded above all things any such inopportune discovery regarding himself, but this full catastrophe had never presented its dread semblance. His very retirement converted into a weapon for their destruction! Certainly this last of his enemy's machinations appeared indeed the most fiendish.

One other matter caused Mr. Garland grave care; he had been thinking of this at the time of Barnard's intrusion: the attitude taken by the public in the face of the slanders circulating; it caused him poignant sorrow that the knowledge of his character as judged by his work should not preclude any such falling away of confidence. He resolved to confront this public wavering, and read it a lesson greatly needed in modern times.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LESSON READ TO A PEOPLE.

SHOULD "The Natural History of Pew-Openers" ever be written, a gallery of their portraits ever be arranged, a lecture upon the species ever be delivered, then must Miss Turner be remembered; so essentially was that quiet, decorous, amiable person a very model of the perfect type of old-school aisles-women whom every pastor who adheres to the traditions of our fathers would like to secure—especially those believing in a comely, well-behaved person who, with lightness and expedition, would conduct the halting stranger to the seat not likely to be required by its holder at the particular service he attended.

Trade might be slack at the little mart in Preston Terrace, ladies might seem to have altogether abandoned the picturesque manipulation of Berlin wools, and the stationery section be at a stand-still, but it in no degree affected Miss Turner's civil and respectful address: ever at her post, and at all times by a pleasant manner showing that it was a congenial office, she certainly tried her best to prove how thoroughly devotion to a cause may be the mainspring of success.

We who have previously penetrated the recesses of this elderly-in-years but young-in-faithfulness coadjutor's heart, know the secret admiration she treasured, and the simple constancy which rendered the conducting of every person along the aisle to hear *him* preach, a process of singular delight. The man was so much of a hero, so elevated a being, that although she might be sitting upon the very back seat in the church—so distant that she would never place another there—so far away that the tenderest of his tones, the lower utterances quivering

with emotion, were indistinguishable, yet she hung upon his words as those do who hear only with the heart. Miss Turner's mind had of late been greatly upset because of the damaging reports in circulation defamatory to her hero. It had not diminished the attendance, but then they were the people who attended from curiosity, and whose morbid taste would take them as soon to a Police Court as to a Church. Her hero had passed the defiling border-line dividing celebrity from notoriety; he was no longer—to the crowd—the ideal of all Christian excellence and eloquence, but the famous man who, possibly, had done something wrong, and, if he had not, ought to have done; and as this sort of hero pleases the crowd the best, there was no diminution in the attendance at the services, although there was a serious decrease in Church membership; the ladies who sat plover fashion, and other credulous and particular families, having withdrawn. It was all a sincere grief to the pew-opener, who believed him as pure as any human being could be, guiltless and very near sinless. She felt it acutely, this inroad of a laughing, whispering, careless set, many of whom did not even find the places in the hymn-books she courteously handed to them. And Miss Turner wondered whether he knew it; had any ripple of the foully-disturbed current reached his lofty stand-point; and what did he think of it? So high! Could man stand higher? And to be assailed by such coarse slander! This indignant worthy woman felt she would like to follow up, trace to its noisome covert each slimily-crawling lie, and extract its fang. The greatest as he was the best, and they could not let even him alone! Miss Turner could hardly contain herself when reflecting upon the poisonous trail; half the night she was awake, devising means for checking the pestilent lie; but what could she do, poor soul, with her restricted influence, in her humble sphere of labour?

The charges were grave, Miss Turner knew, but who on earth could substantiate one of them? As if a calumny or a scandal ever needed substantiating.

One evening, at eight o'clock service, amongst others crowding in was a polite elderly gentleman, who, by reason of his

gently affable manner, won upon Miss Turner's attention before the other folk. Leaning towards her, the gentleman introduced a friend who, he said, had come a very long distance to hear Mr. Garland preach; would she kindly place them in a seat near the pulpit, as they were a little deaf! A mild fiction on the part of the man popularly thought mad, but he was so anxious that Sir Kinnaird, whom he had actually induced to come on purpose, should see and hear the Minister to the best advantage, that he adopted this appeal to the sympathy of the mild-eyed, kind-faced pew-opener; and she at once conducted the two gentlemen and a little girl who accompanied them to Mr. Blake's pew, immediately below the pulpit. "Your Lordship," whispered Sir Dickson Cheffinger over the hymn-book Miss Turner had placed in his hand, and across little Ella sitting between the two, "will now have an opportunity of seeing the famous Minister;" and then Sir Dickson lowered his head to the book-ledge, knowing it to be the custom. He had a hazy notion what to say, but he mumbled something to himself about speedily being restored to his rights, and was devotional in the extreme. Sir Kinnaird, who was never equal to stooping or bending, effected a compromise by holding his hat with his very elegant and lady-like hand before his face; then he looked admiringly around the building, the architecture of which pleased him.

It was the evening following that of Barnard's memorable intrusion. The day had brought the document demanded, also a communication to the effect that arrangements were in progress for carrying out the other conditions; to this was added the disagreeable intelligence that the little girl had escaped from the custody of his servant, and could not be traced. Mr. Garland was exceedingly troubled and care-worn in consequence, and by no means in the best cue for his duties, but firm in his intention of occupying the pulpit, that personally he might confront rumour and dispel report. He had learned by inquiry made with every care through Constance, that his poor wife was ill at the house of Mrs. Evans. During the day no further steps were taken, as it was urgently necessary to use the utmost caution at this juncture.

Mr. Garland was in the vestry, talking confidentially with the Rev. Spencer Webb. The curate was full of sympathy with his friend now passing under this tidal wave of prejudice and suspicion, and predicted for it but a brief season.

"Do let me prevail upon you to return home, and allow Mr. Evelyn or myself to preach?"

"I have no intention of preaching to-night, my dear friend, —a few passages of Scripture to serve as a word or two with my people." Said with marvellous gentleness, yet with such sad regret Mr. Webb was much moved.

"The church is filling fast!" A sorrowful expression was upon the speaker's face; he knew the motive bringing these people to stare upon this calm, outraged disciple of gentleness and love. But a terrible light was gathering in the eye; the nostrils dilated with a sense of indignity and wrong; veins on the white, broad brow, outlined a course not hitherto perceptible; the cheeks bore a faint flush seldom seen there, and when he took Webb's hand it was with a throbbing and convulsive, albeit firm, grasp.

"I will teach these people a lesson the like of which never was taught from pulpit, and answer them, in Higher Word than mine, the whole of their base charge."

He was trembling slightly, but would soon be composed. Mr. Webb gently drew an oak chair towards him, and the Minister sat down wearily.

"Let me again beg of you to retire for to-night; you are not well; you have had too much of late to try your strength. As usual, you have been thinking all of others and never of yourself."

"I am thinking of myself to-night." It was said with pathetic significance. "A delicate remonstrance is, I consider, due. I can address this to my people with more propriety than your kind self or Mr. Evelyn." Then he abruptly asked, "Are any of the Blakes here this evening?"

"No. Strangers occupy their pew."

"I am glad of that. Give me my small Bible, and leave me for a few minutes to myself."

With loving respect Mr. Webb did as desired, and pro-

ceeded to the organist's room, where Mr. Evelyn was giving that gentleman his directions.

When alone, the Minister sat to the table with an almost stern aspect, so inflexible was it. He had been bitterly attacked, and there are some creatures of too magnificent an organization to submit tamely to excess of injury. With the precise yet ready faculty usually characterizing his study of Scripture, he had selected his passages and marked his annotations before the evening service commenced, and then indulged in short but earnest prayer.

When the verger came to him, with the one churchwarden who remained faithful, to assist him with his gown, he informed them that he would not leave the vestry until the hymn before the sermon, when, at the last verse, he would proceed straight to the pulpit; and he desired that a glass of water might be there in readiness if required.

Up to the ordeal he wished to be alone.

Soul-sympathy caught of the eye is at all times the helpful human source of inspiration in the pulpit. If he met eyes upon this evening they would, he felt sure, be cold, or curious, or speculative—rudely bold, with vile doubt behind, mockingly cruel, unfeeling; but he determined they should not oppress the intention—righteous and just intention—with which he entered the pulpit. "If I speak to them in the words of Holy Writ," he thought, "it may carry more weight than any language of mine."

All this time Miss Turner's activity had been taxed to an unusual degree, and she was just wondering where she could put our friends, Miss Ticklewich and Miss Caddie, and had at last made room for them under the gallery, when the doorway was blocked by a number of ladies, the leader of whom accosted poor Miss Turner imperiously with "You'll put us all together, please." There were thirteen of them, and Miss Turner didn't know how or where to oblige, with all her agile, accommodating willingness; but Miss Penelope and party had come specially to quiz and revile this preacher, and if Miss Turner made any trouble about it, they would march in a body and take possession of the pulpit stairs, and they told her so. This

alarmed the worthy creature so much that, quick and decorous of movement, she brought chairs from the schoolroom, and placed them in line down the centre aisle.

Mrs. Wriggle was also present upon this occasion. There was a wide distinction, in Mrs. Wriggle's opinion, between a sinner and a saint. A conscientious Congregationalist might go to stare at a sinner in the church, who would have no business to sit under the same person when considered a saint. Before the service was over Mrs. Wriggle received change in full.

Mrs. Lurch was there. Mr. Lurch had resigned his office from motives of principle and scrupulous regard for the honour of the Establishment, but Mrs. Lurch was there, a whisper having reached her that the man at bay would have a word or two to say; and she wondered keenly what he would have the audacity to put forward in extenuation. Mrs. Lurch, with a pang, sat and looked the side-seats hard in the face; she suffered on account of not being able to sit in her cap. Mrs. Lurch considered it outrageous that ladies should be obliged to wear bonnets during divine service.

Mrs. and Miss Bobbin were present. Miss Bobbin looked plaintively at the Rev. Mr. Webb while that gentleman was reading the Lessons, as though imploring his special protection in the event of a scene when that dreadful Minister appeared. It was significantly noted that he was not present, in his pew or at the Communion-table, during the reading of the Prayers, and the clever ones, with scoffing toss-up of their heads, whispered, "Daren't show his face, you know;" while those who were not clever sneeringly replied, "A little too warm for him this evening, perhaps."

Only one person thought the truth—that he was faint and ill; but that he would, when the time came, go through his duty like a being to whom weakness was unknown. It was Miss Turner who guessed all, and she would have given much to go to him with the service of a Martha.

The Countess of Comdarlington had arrived, and with her the Hon. Mrs. Glover and Miss Glover. At dinner that evening her ladyship said, "Mr. Garland informed the Earl this morning that he would be away in Devonshire some

few weeks, so that if you would like to hear him for the last time, I believe, you must go to this evening's service."

With propriety and impressiveness the service proceeded until singing of the hymn before the sermon. While the congregation were singing the last verse, more eyes upon the vestry door than upon their hymn-books, it was opened by the verger, and there was a thrill electric through the whole area as the Minister appeared, and, with almost majestic mien, ascended the pulpit stairs. And the people thought it did not look much like guiltiness or shame-strickenness. "But then, you know, it's his method of braving it out," said the clever ones; "when the clergy are detected at this sort of thing they're sure to carry a high hand." Those who were not clever said. "He knows he daren't show his face here again, and means to brave it." Merely an echo of what the clever people had said, but whispered with as sharp venom as though original. This darker machinery works in certain grooves.

The hymn was ended; the last note of the organ lingered, as though giving him all the time possible; rustling of silk dresses subsided; the book which somebody always drops when there is a painful hush had dropped; every eye in the building, save those of one person were upon the Minister. Miss Turner, somehow, could not look at him; there was a sublime and awful expression upon his face, and the tender-hearted pew-opener could not look thereon. By his wish the gas had not been lowered upon this occasion, and he stood before his people with a certain sad haughtiness that made itself felt before a word was uttered. The silence was profound and painful. He seemed astonishingly at his leisure, so calmly was he turning the leaves of the Bible, not in the least, however, as though trifling or playing with the occasion or the effect; rather as overweighted by the responsibility of his purpose. Then he announced this passage of Scripture in a clear, firm voice—in the deathlike stillness, it had never seemed so clear—"The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, the ninth chapter, the third verse." A pause. Faithful to his intention, he did not look at any person while reading forth this bold preliminary passage, "*Mine answer to them that*

do examine me is this!" And people looked at one another, and then, just out of curiosity, hunted for the place to see if it really was in the Bible—it seemed so apposite—but having in their astonishment forgotten whose epistle, and to whom sent, they couldn't find it, and set it down as an invention.

From the entrance of the Minister a spell was upon Sir Kinnaird Dalton, whose delicate organization, never equal to surprises of any sort, was for a time entirely unnerved before this stupendous redivivus; but then he soothingly reassured himself, thinking after the old cynical fashion, "It'll make the turning up of people more confusing than ever, now the really defunct have commenced to fill the pulpits; but it will vary proceedings, and most of the churches will benefit by the change. I should like to go up and grasp his hand, and tell him I forgive the cruel deception, but of course one cannot do that before all these people." By the time this had, with difficulty, crossed the Baronet's equably-tempered understanding, he became conscious the recognition was even more unsettling to his little companion: startled and breathless in her surprise, she sat with large open eyes looking upward while emotion sent the colour hot to her cheeks.

He never looked towards their pew; he had been told strangers were there, and for a time strangers were an eyesore. The brief pause—an impressive interval of suspense, when every uplifted face betrayed the eager expectancy, when every head was busy wondering what discourse would follow that significant text—then was heard this, uttered in the same grave tone, with the same grave, yet haughty calmness, "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, the ninth chapter, the eleventh verse." A pause. "Goodness!" said Mrs. Wriggle to herself, "if the man isn't going to have two texts!" She heard it: "*And, behold, the man which had the inkhorn by his side reported the matter;*" and "I know that isn't in the Bible," she said: "I should think he wants an anonymous post-card sent to him with those words on from the last chapter of Revelation, descriptive of the plagues bestowed upon the man who adds to the Scriptures!" Meanwhile, the congregation was exercising itself wonderingly, and a reporter for one of the Brighton papers

began to feel uncomfortable, moving a little to the left, an exceedingly stout lady in front affording the grateful shelter of a rock in the burning desert. The Minister did not pause so long between this and the next passage it was his pleasure to read; the people, if they would, might think them in connexion: "The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, the third chapter, the seventh and eighth verses." A pause. Then deliberate reading of this passage: "*Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*" He waited, that the verse might sink deep, before proclaiming its companion,— "*Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued.*" Whereat Mrs. Lurch tossed her head with infinite disgust, but remembering the action failed to bear impressiveness without the cap, she was satisfied with looking scandalized, on behalf of Mr. Lurch, so late an office-bearer of the church, and with setting the example of the only course proper under so personal an attack to the connexions present of other office-bearers who did not keep a brougham. In view of all this, and remembering her position as wife of one of the leading tradesmen in Brighton, Mrs. Lurch indignantly quitted her pew, and marched out, followed by the said connexions, who were scattered here and there about the church. It created some commotion. The Minister waited until there was silence, still looking upon his book; he had scarcely lifted his eyes from the avenging pages; then gave out one other passage, "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, the thirty-sixth chapter, the third verse." In the short interval between this and the words, Mrs. Bobbin whispered Miss Merino, "I never did like that Prophet Ezekiel, what little I've read of him!" and Miss Merino whispered back, "I do feel so timorous, Ma; the place seems full of thunders and lightnings. I'd go out, but I'm so nervous." The preacher was heard reading: "*Thus saith the Lord God, Ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people.*" The Hon. Mrs. Glover, turning to her friend the Countess, observed, in a seriously displeased manner, "I am so sorry we came, dear; this is profane! No person has a right to twist the Sacred Chronicles to suit his purpose." "Bear

with him, darling," replied her ladyship; "but he is a naughty one, I do believe."

Yet one glance at the face, with its aggrieved sadness—an expression that since he commenced had deepened to solemnity—was sufficient to dispose of any opinion as to his reverence and devotion. He had never appeared more thoroughly in earnest, more impressed with the responsibility of his priestly office. Immoveable, inflexible, he continued calmly as before,—

"The Book of Job, the thirtieth chapter, the first verse." People found this—Job xxx. 1 was easy of remembrance. The young people, who had been forward with jeer and jest, were particularly quick at finding it; they rather enjoyed the lesson being read to their elders; but they very soon lost the place again while the Minister read, "*They that are younger than I have me in derision;*" and without pausing he read on, "The twenty-first chapter of the Book of Job, the third verse: '*Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on.*'" Oh, yes, they quite thought them in connexion; too much so! The colour mounted to their cheeks. Miss Merino, with pardonable yearning to be in affinity with these young deriders, tried to look as though the coupled reproach covered her also with confusion; the attempt was futile, and caused a thin, afflicted-looking person next to her to shrink acutely, believing Miss Merino was going to sneeze; and with violent antipathy to persons sneezing anywhere, the thin, afflicted-looking person especially disliked it in church, and when sitting next to it.

The large number of people who had come from vulgar curiosity and out of sheer desire to stare for half an hour, at cushioned leisure and gratis, at the man everybody was talking about,—this considerable body of persons began to wish themselves well out of it, for there was no telling what this goaded and baited hero would say to them; he seemed all in the mood, with that quiet, resolute manner of his. They didn't think it was going to be like this, or they wouldn't have come. And while they were thus agreeing, the Minister read again,—

"The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, the fifty-first chapter, the fifty-first verse: '*We are confounded, because we have heard*

reproach: for strangers are come into the sanctuaries of the Lord's house.'"

And they who had done so looked vicious and vexed; and, disliking it altogether, very many of them arose and left the sanctuary to the Minister's own people.

Wonderful was the light upon that meek woman's face at her humble station by the door. She had wanted to take his part, to stand his champion; but how effectively he was doing this for himself, and without one of his own gifted words, that, occasion demanding, she did not doubt would be even as arrows of fire.

The exodus of strangers did not disturb that stern yet suffering judge; upholding a righteous cause, he was not troubled by the departure of any whose conscience would not permit of their remaining. But it was curious to see the gaps. He did not see them; his eyes were upon the Book whereby he judged, whereby he lived.

He read continuously these several passages, that dropped like shells amongst the people,—"The Thirty-first Psalm, the thirteenth verse: *'For I have heard the slander of many.'* The tenth chapter of Ecclesiastes, the eleventh verse: *'Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.'* The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, the second chapter, the sixteenth and seventeenth verses: *'Shun profane and vain babblings. Their word will eat as doth a canker.'* The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians, the fourth chapter, the twenty-ninth verse: *'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.'* The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians, the fourth chapter, the eleventh verse: *'Study to be quiet, and to do your own business.'* The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, the eleventh chapter, the twenty-first verse: *'I speak as concerning reproach.'* The Book of Leviticus, the nineteenth chapter, the sixteenth verse: *'Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people.'*"

"I say," whispered Sir Dickson Cheffinger to Sir Kinnaird Dalton, "what is it all about?"

"Goodness knows! Sounds like an adieu, with a summary

at the close of a pastorate. But what an awful fellow for texts!"

Miss Ticklewich and friend could really sit no longer at a service, as they expressed it, which was a mere burlesque upon holiness, and conducted with a total disregard of reverence and everything else. It was not because it was a week-night service that it was to be travestied in this form; it only proved the hardihood and confident audacity of this man, to whom the multitude had looked for spiritual guidance. Miss Caddie, however, said far less than her companion, upon whom the mantle had fallen ever since the Comdarlington *réunion*. As they made a way out for themselves they were joined by Mrs. Wriggle, who had never worn so sour a look. "If Ebenezer had been here," she said aloud, as they passed out of the centre door, "he would have answered some o' them Scripter charges —a crawling, crafty jumble of sentiments as never ought to have been invented and inserted by a set of stupid Revisers, who were evidently unqualified for their work, or they'd have either left out all likely to give offence to respectable and well-to-do people, or else have put 'em all together under one heading, in italics, '*Sentence of the Congregation on a Perjured Priest!*' I've no patience with such a Behemoth and Pharisee, without principle, and past arguing with or bettering."

Although Mrs. Wriggle's denunciations were not lucid they were strictly acid; the dear friends with her found the lady's company a piquant addition to their own little dish, but not acceptable enough for an invitation to supper.

Several other people left the church at the same time. When silence was restored, and not before, the Minister resumed the reading of his lesson. It was to a thinned congregation, yet perhaps on that very account an extra attentive one; it is certain those left bestowed extreme heed to the words, and expressed their opinion afterwards.

"The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, the ninth chapter, the fourth verse: '*Every neighbour will walk with slanders.*'" Yes, many of these neighbours *had* done, but when told of it thought the thing cowardly. He continued: "The eighteenth chapter and eighteenth verse: '*Then said they, Come, and let*

us devise devices; for the law shall not perish from the priest. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.'" And they looked at one another curiously, their conscience smiting them: the preacher continuing, "The twentieth chapter, the tenth and eleventh verses: '*For I heard the defaming of many. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him. But the Lord is with me as a mighty, terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed, their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.*'"

These neighbours could bear no more. They rose in a body, and left the church. Really the pews were becoming sparsely occupied, the devoted remainder looking too obdurate to feel anything. Even the Rev. Robert Evelyn was disconcerted; it was not orthodox, by any means. He looked his disapproval across to the Rev. Spencer Webb, when the Rev. Spencer Webb nodded slightly, as to signify it was all right, and their friend knew what he was about.

Their friend had not yet closed account with his congregation, for he proceeded to read, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, the fourth chapter, the third verse: '*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.*'" "Ah!" thought they, "he is for brazening it out with insolent assurance!" But they heard this: "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, the fourth chapter, the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth verses: '*Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved.*'" And they modified their views, he continuing: "St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the fourth chapter, the eighth and ninth verses: '*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*' The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the fiftieth chapter, the eighth verse: '*He is near that justifieth me.*' The Book of

Job, the twenty-ninth chapter, the fourteenth verse: '*My judgment was as a robe and a diadem.*'"

It really seemed so, looking upon that glorious figure in the pulpit, his countenance lighted from the inner consciousness of innocence and purity. And thus thought the pew-opener while her entranced gaze seldom left his face. He was rather longer in giving utterance to the next passages, and his voice was moved to tenderness; so tender was it one and another wondered whether that stern aspect could have been real. "St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the twelfth chapter, the fifteenth verse: '*The more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.*'" It fell as a keen-edged reproach, and they began to fidget the hassocks, and move with their toes impatiently. It was not all. He gave out: "The twentieth verse: '*For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, back-bitings, whisperings.*'" Those last fears were particularly applicable to some whose occupations they were. "St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," the preacher resumed, "the fourth chapter, the ninth verse: '*But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*'" They had not asked of themselves a question so pertinent; and, now it was asked by him who had turned accuser, they could not answer it. And that there might be no mistake as to whom he addressed himself, this followed: "St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, the first chapter, the twenty-first verse: '*You, that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind.*'" United to it a gentle pastoral remonstrance. "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians, the second chapter, the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth verses: '*Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as we know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy.*'" It needed not their quickly beating hearts to bear testimony to its truth; it was written of deeds that would never die, its witness was spoken of the poor and sorrowing, those with no

helper and having no friend. Some of these remembered that, and, stricken, they also with bowed heads, and reverently quitted the building. He had many a time and oft filled buildings to overflowing, this memorable night he was emptying his church, without any aid from the eloquence he would not deign to use for such a purpose.

There were those remaining "staring stonily," who had been delighted to draw the attention of friends and acquaintances to the fact of his having a banking account, to the circumstance of the considerable treasure he was, in their opinion, amassing together. And those who had been indirectly influenced, by the elaborate machinations of Barnard, to think and speak slightingly of the Minister. And those who had been assiduous in criticizing his books and searching for defects and inequalities. To all he replied in a few well-chosen phrases. "The Book of Job, the thirty-first chapter, the twenty-fourth and other verses: '*If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above. If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul. Behold, my desire is, that mine adversary had written a book.*'"

When he included that super-delicate ethical propriety of the heart being enticed, and the mouth kissing the hand those who had disseminated scandal to that effect felt embarrassed and touched at last; he gave the conclusion to that matter with daring innovation that was emphatically a cure. "The Book of Job, the thirty-first chapter, the first verse: '*I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?*'" It was not to be supposed even they could sit patiently under that! With general consent, as it were, they arose and with an outraged and virtuous expression followed the example of those who had departed. The exponents of the gold theory, taking advantage of the confusion thus

created, went out also, under shelter; and the critics followed them. Mr. Garland's hearers were few at this point: the indefatigable Miss Penelope and band, however, determined (strength being given them) to see it out.

Very calmly did the Minister read his next selections from Scripture, but with terrible decision. "St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, the second chapter, the twelfth verse: '*I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*'" Miss Penelope's head tossed in revolt, and she looked round with ominous meaning to the string, sitting still in a ghastly line, although on both sides of them was a waste of empty pews. The preacher proceeded: "The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the fifty-ninth chapter, the fourth and fifth verses: '*They trust in vanity and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper.*'"

The cockatrice settled it; the whole band, with exception of Miss Dido, whose heart had warmed at the mention of eggs, was too acutely wounded by adoption of that word to remain any longer. They could have borne any other term, but that fatal application was the straw breaking their sublime resolution to sit it out, come what come would! With loathing and scorn Miss Penelope and attendant goddesses strode forth, with noise, and with bitterness. The majority of those remaining accompanied them.

Then the Rev. Westley Garland spake his closing passages to the slender few left to hear them, perhaps the few of all that large concourse truly faithful to him. "St. Paul to the Philippians, the fourth chapter, the eighth verse: and the Epistle of James, the first chapter, the twenty-seventh verse: '*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Pure religion and undefiled before God is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*'"

These were his last words in the pulpit upon that memorable occasion, and it was a fitting termination, rounding the roughness of grouping, and making symmetrical the fragmentary whole. Afterwards he sat back as he was accustomed to do after preaching, shading the brow and eyes with his hand. He looked very pale and harassed upon this trying evening.

The Rev. Robert Evelyn gave out the closing hymn, and the slender residue of worshippers entered into the praise with spirit. It seemed to revive him; he raised his head, looking upward, a beautiful light on the face. From old habit, unconsciously, his gaze wandered in the direction of Joseph Blake's pew, and rested upon the face of Ella; he had so often looked down upon Rose thinking of his own, and fancying her there. This reality, albeit thrilling him to the soul, was to him as imaginary; sight grew dim, he closed his eyes, pained. The solemnity of the music, the low song of the people, moved him to tender melancholy; he longed to be alone, where no human eye could see: he was so tired of the publicity—bearable by pleasant lines, but unutterably wearying by these darker tracks. The people retired, the Minister walked to the vestry, where Mr. Webb and Mr. Evelyn awaited him with affectionate solicitude.

"I know how distasteful this has been to you," said Mr. Webb, relieving their friend of his gown.

"I have engaged in more happy work, I admit; I shall not mind the unpleasantness if my dear people apprehend by it the wrong involved in their suspicions. Do not wait, I shall be here but a very short time, and will see that all is left in order. Many thanks for all!"

They understood that he wished to be alone, and with instant and thoughtful delicacy, left him.

All the stately building was shadowy and dim; a light in the vestry, a light by the door where the patient pew-opener sat immovable, as though carved from that dusky changeless oak. Yet, silent though she was, she breathed quick with sudden interest and sympathy. She saw him walk with slow pace and lowered head to the altar! It was as though he walked in thought, in devotion, or in pain.

And most truly it was with each of these he betook himself to the most sacred site where man, made minister, and minister, made man, can go with his burden of sorrows and of hopes. It was his last approach for a long time; and, moved by solemn and conflicting emotion, he would there lay and leave all his care and trouble, taking hence but the peace which comes with perfect assurance of divine love, and the calm which is natural after turmoil in the war betwixt Good and Evil. He was powerfully affected while kneeling there; but it was all dark, and there was no one remaining of all that loved him save the poor pew-opener. Stay! A footstep so light it was as though one of the winged seraphs from the marble slabs upon the walls had flitted before the altar; it stole upon him there, wound an arm around his neck, stooped with love the sweetest under Heaven, with lips that kissed and whispered "Papa, dear, my own darling, dear Papa!" A gentle and low utterance, but passionate with love; and it shook him mightily; he knew then what he had seen was real, knew that his own had found him while he had been vainly searching for those lost. He could not speak for a little while, but turned and drew her to him, his throbbing brow falling restingly upon her bosom, where she stood by him trembling. Both their hearts were too frail with the suffering which had long been their portion, to evince either control or firmness. Restored to one another's love, life sweetened by the return to life, danger and difficulty over, a realm of still happiness opening before them, it was indeed a thrilling moment, and a strangely unlooked-for sequel to those incidents that had crowded upon each. Within himself, he felt glad to be reunited to his darling thus; it was idyllic, and partook of the solemn aspect which led him to feel her restored by Him before whom all altars are. It was the sweet reward that followed upon toil, and the after-joy of which he had so often thought. There was the fine simplicity of true poetry about it all; a grave, imposing recital comely with anxieties at rest, espoused to calm thankfulness, the silent praise which in the low light of evenings in the East follows the seductive strains of cymbal and song rejoicingly.

The two by the altar in that shadowy church, where he had so often swayed the crowd, presented a singular reflection upon destiny; and neither poet nor artist could well have designed a situation of deeper meaning than this, come about so simply. Show us some ingenious puzzle-intricacy of greys, some artful commingling of shadows, some reflex of the primary beauty of steel-cloud and silver, and it will not be more significant with grave tint and tone, or more chaste with absence of all garish colour! It was all in accord with the quieter calling.

With marvellous tenderness the Minister took his child to the heart that had never ceased to love her with the tenderness that has passed describing by words. Little was said, but that naturally had reference to her mother, and Ella's surprise and grief may be conceived when he delicately told her of how that mother was lying ill at the village near by. It must occupy their instant attention; Ella did not possess her father's calm knowledge of the danger of shocks, and would have flown to the dear one there and then; but the Minister explained the priceless lesson of patience, explained that the abruptness of love may be at times a selfishness and a cruelty. It must be broken with wonderful gentleness to their dear suffering one; and little Ella, when promised this loving office should be performed by herself, was fain to be content. He knew no creature in the world would perform a mission of such delicacy with more gentle tact.

Then they went down the church; in the vestibule the Baronet and his erratic companion were awaiting the issue with impatience. An affecting greeting passed between the friends of so very opposite nature. Sir Dickson Cheffinger stood in the back-ground with retiring respect, until Sir Kinnaird with his languid grace drew the Minister's more immediate attention to the poor gentleman.

"You must thank Sir Dickson Cheffinger for the recovery of your little girl; he discovered her and brought her to my house, rightly judging I would interest myself at as early a moment as my awfully torpid temperament would admit of. But I really do think," continued the Baronet, while the Minister warmly grasped Sir Dickson's hand, "you have

done me good, and have stirred the sluggish current; the whole affair is so out of the beaten track, and your valedictory address was so unusual, I half entered into the spirit of the thing. But what have they been up to?"

"Falling into the weakness of modern times, making light of the ministry, and sport of the minister!"

The fastidious Sir Kinnaird, who never touched this sort of thing, said, with a movement of indolent weariness,—

"Better go on to my hotel; lot of draughts here, a general discomfort that may chill one's proper tone. What are you going to do?" To Sir Dickson, whom he was by no means anxious to take to his hotel.

"Look for some quiet apartments," replied the poor gentleman humbly.

"I think my friend here has some rooms that will suit you very well," said the Minister kindly, indicating Miss Turner with a courteous movement of the hand.

The pew-opener bowed with meek but grateful appreciation.

"Miss Turner will show you to her house, where you will be very comfortable." Shaking hands with Sir Dickson, he drew him aside, and in a low voice acquainted him with this startling piece of news, "I have been to CHEFFINGER upon your business; it is in my power to return this good service, as I promised I would do if possible; you will be installed at CHEFFINGER ere very long!"

The poor gentleman heard, and long after they had gone, stood dazed beneath its overwhelming import. It was not until the gentle voice of the pew-opener broke that spell that he bestirred himself, and gradually realized all its happy meaning. Then he said to himself, "Cousin Claude has filled the old place with many guests, I have heard, but what troops of visitors *I* shall have, when I am installed at CHEFFINGER!"

They walked on to Preston Terrace, and Sir Dickson was greatly taken with it, and also with his kind landlady.

"One thing has surprised me," said Sir Kinnaird to the Minister on the way to the hotel; "it is that while under process of transmigration you did not develope into a Doctor

of Divinity at once, so many of the fellows we used to know have passed into that, presumably, happier state."

"I don't know why it should be; I did not think it necessary. I relied upon the one simple title our own and other Churches permit and honour, without even so much as taking advantage of the University degree to which I am, as you know, entitled. It would be interesting to know, however," he added with half-sad, half-comical earnestness, "whether the higher grade exempts the modern minister from that vein of criticism which verges upon the slanderous."

CHAPTER XLIV.

REUNITED.

A NEAT and pleasant chamber, where shaded light and exquisite stillness aided an invalid's gradual recovery.

The blow, shattering and prostrating in its immediate effect, weakening in its results, and fraught throughout with an astonishing and horrible revulsion of feeling, was yet not one to destroy feeling through destruction of reason, nor annihilate pain by the extinction of life. This delicate fragile lady had passed the portals of a martyrdom more bitter than is the fate of her sex in its most disastrous calamities, and was slowly experiencing the consciousness which is the more vivid side of pain, permitting of reasoning upon the origin and cause. Those long weary hours when she was lying there thinking, with the keenest sensibility, seemed fraught with that intense despair utterly beyond the pale of hope. It was when she was alone, and the kind friend whose ministering seemed so infinitely tender had gone about her household duty, that she suffered thus. As frequently as those duties would permit, Mrs. Evans sat by the bedside, holding her friend's hand with soft compelling solicitude, and so great was the delicacy of her sympathy those seasons were endued with helpful restorative influence. It would be difficult to relate how finely this gentle lady's sensitive condolence came in at this crisis. She asked no questions, and did not burden the invalid—the common error of their sex—by recounting all her own sorrowful experiences, although she had more than enough sad memories of her own.

It was the morning following the events described in the

last chapter, and Mrs. Evans was busy at her household duties, while Bertie sat by the window reading. Looking up from his book, Bertie saw their famous neighbour, the Minister, unlatching the garden-gate, and with him a little girl. He hurried to the kitchen to tell his mother, who was making some jelly, but she placed this on one side for a moment, while she went to the door. Mr. Garland greeted the lady with the kind consideration usual with him; she noticed, however, that his voice was tremulous. He explained sufficient in a few words to enlist her most careful assistance, and while he waited below, she took the little girl upstairs, and placed her for a minute or two in a room adjoining that of the invalid. The latter, with susceptibilities sharpened, noticed the change upon the face of her friend, although it was but transitory; she had moreover heard the sound of visitors at the door. "What is it?" she asked, with breathless dread and expectancy, which will be readily understood and sympathized with. The other preserving as calm a bearing as was possible, said,—

"Merely the visit of a friend, dear, to inquire how you are this morning; do not let it disturb you." How much the eyes tell at these instant periods! Mrs. Travers, raising herself with excited eager nervousness, begged to be told who it was that had called. And her friend gently replied, "One you will be so relieved to know is well, and to have with you; your little girl has been brought from London to bear you company."

"Thank God!" murmured Mrs. Travers, sinking back, a glad light playing upon her face; she had indeed, as her friend knew, been exceedingly distressed on account of her child, although believing her safe at Sir Horace Vivian's. Mrs. Evans was greatly rejoiced and encouraged by that sunnier gleam, and presently said,—

"I will bring Ella in, shall I?"

The other gratefully assenting by an inclination of the head, her friend went to Ella and told her that her Mamma was delighted to hear she had come, and anxious at once to see her. Mrs. Evans then returned to the Minister,

aware that the little girl would perform her mission best alone.

Ella closed the door noiselessly and advanced with the lightness so remarkably her characteristic, and knelt down by the bedside as softly, while her fingers stole bird-like to those trembling hands put out towards her. Her mother was crying and could not speak, and the child preserved the attitude of simple devoted love, until she was more composed. Then she said faintly,—

"It is a great comfort to have you with me, darling; I have prayed for this."

"Dear, dear Mamma, why did I not know of it sooner? But I have come now to nurse and make you well, and you will soon be stronger; then we shall be happier than ever before; really and truly, dear Mamma;" looking with bold confidence in her mother's eyes, and sending a curious thrill to her soul. There was a depth of assuring eloquence that carried greater weight than a more laboured introduction would have done. To the child's astonishment her mother seemed to read her very thoughts; raising herself slightly upon her elbow and looking with terrible wistfulness in her little girl's eyes.

"Ella, dear, what has happened since we met, your face seems beaming with joy?"

"How can it help, Mamma, being again with you? But I have something very sweet to tell you, presently, dear!"

Her arm wound caressingly about her mother's neck, and by a lovely action she drew the throbbing head towards her, laying a little hand cool and soft upon the temples. This control and the firmness, soothed and lulled the eagerness and emotion. Ella felt all the imminent hazard of the time, and preserved that gentle repose with an effort of will that confirmed the opinion Constance had formed. The life of this beloved mother was trembling in the balance; it was a time when words even might break the agonized spirit upon the wheel. The child tried to keep her heart's beating back, and to stay the quick breathing that she feared fanned the dear one's cheek too tremulously. With the tenderness of old with

which she had been wont to lightly smooth her mother's hair when the head ached, she now passed her hand with tranquillizing movement over the soft bands, and was startled to notice since doing so last some streaks of silver had appeared. The action, electric, and from a child's hand the best banishment of pain, now assuaged the feverish vibrating pangs that with every pulsation seemed to dart from heart to head. The little girl continued her reassuring, quietly restoring influence, and she could feel a gradual calmness, and lessened throbbing, could see the hectic flush grow lower, the terrible glitter in the eyes become subdued.

Then, carelessly as possible, and still without timidity, Ella said,—

"You have told me sometimes about a cruel enemy with whom Papa had quarrelled, and who brought us to sorrow—"

"Yes"—looking up with affrighted suddenness at the very mention of him.

"That unhappy day when poor Papa left us he met this man, and another, in the lane leading to the sea, and it was through them it happened; they would have gladly seen him drowned: but God saved him, to return to us after doing the work He saved him for; you know of it, dear Mamma, but do not know all the truth, for when they found he had been saved, they schemed to rob him a second time and again to make people think the worst. And in this you were to be included."

The child paused here, to allow her earnest words to be grasped. She had spoken with a simplicity and depth of feeling which carried conviction with them. A mere child, unversed in eloquence, yet using words in themselves of meaning; briefly expressing the child's summary of the drama, without logic possibly, but plentiful with pathos; and uttered without once by tear or tremor giving cause for emotional display. And although inwardly agitated, Mrs. Travers preserved her feelings overcoming her in an outburst of tears, for she grasped the office her little girl had accepted, and the child's presence of mind acted restrainingly, she felt so for her at this painful time.

Seeing her mother continue calm, grateful for it and more happy, Ella resumed,—

"You remember Lady Guilmere, the lady of whose goodness we so often used to hear? Well, Papa was saved by her servants, and was taken to her house. When well enough, her ladyship persuaded him to become a minister, and the opportunity was offered of doing so in Brighton. Of course Papa's first thought had been for you and me, but for a time he yielded to Lady Guilmere, who advised him that greater service would be done to all of us by his making his way alone. But he could not live on so, and hurriedly sent for us, to Devonshire, and to Hertfordshire, thinking Grandpa would be moved by his rumoured death to provide for us at the Court. And when we could not be found his sorrow was so great that he felt sure he had done wrong. And he has not ceased to feel so, or to try to find us; but it seemed we were to be parted for a time, dear Mamma; and won't it make us love him more now than ever in our life before?"

This was said with so glad a delight, and with so innocent an air, the mother, with a passionate impulse, caught the child to her heart, while repeatedly kissing the white brow. She held that pretty head firm: it had been bravely thinking for them; she was of old in darkened days the comforter, she was now the restorer of her peace; and she held her there with an intense thankfulness to God that through all the shifting vicissitudes that had befallen them the child was left to her, and not this only, but had been sent to her as the messenger of life, of love, and peace.

Half shyly, and with a piquant bashfulness, Ella leaned from her a moment to ask, whisperingly,—

"You know Papa is downstairs waiting? And suffering all this time! Shall I go to him now, Mamma, and say—well, do *you* tell me *what* to say."

From this exquisite, playful and serious, glad yet sad entreaty, there was no escape.

"Say that Mamma thinks you have succeeded, darling, in making her feel better and happier; and ask Papa to come to me at once."

The little girl went down to him and with as nice delicacy told him, adding *that Mamma was smiling*. How a little thing —so ridiculous a trifle to those out of the circle of suffering— will reassure ! The man was deadly pale with anxious suspense, and she came to him with news of that smiling, and what an awful weight was lifted, and how he thanked God !

He entered the invalid's chamber with a light step, a reassuring manner, and a presence that carried with it in reserve ample and satisfactory explanation of all that was doubtful and distressing. He knew this would be gathered from his manner with the instant sensitive quickness of the sick and mentally suffering. Without affording her occasion to utter a word, he said, with grave loving earnestness :—

" Everything shall be explained, my darling, without delay beyond the interval necessary for you to recover calmness and confidence ; you will understand all immediately. Be tranquil, create faith in me for a few minutes, the better to sympathize with my explanation."

The firmness which the gentle dominion exercised, the composed thought which this presence of mind compelled, the evident staunch faithfulness to honour and to love,—implied more by the tone of voice than by the words,—all evoked the sympathy he had desired.

A beautiful smile rendered the delicate face so exquisite he could not restrain the love moving him to the soul, and he leaned tenderly forward to kiss her. She took his hand, holding it all fondly on her breast, yet with great timidity, as half apprehensive either of its changed warmth or its lowered truth, or even of the reality of this wonder being genuine, and not one of those mocking fancies which had so often tormented her after the loss of Lionel.

Summoning such composure as was possible, he sat down by the bedside, and in a low voice commenced the narration, which he made brief and pointed, yet complete, using infinite delicacy, but with such wealth of love breaking through it, wherever allusion to herself and their child occurred, that it seemed to soothe and heal in the telling, and restore by the very evolving of motive and purpose. Her whole attention was

absorbed as soon as the dangerous point at the beginning, when his course was first entered upon, was passed, and, if not thought reasonable or right, that course appeared, at least, to be actuated by good motives and for just ends; then, from enchaining her solicitude, and as he proceeded winning her heart-felt interest, he, (with the eloquence of which he was a master, and which had never been directed in more tender or more moving channels,) attracted the sweet union of her forgiveness and assent. With the progress of the relation, its connexion with Constance became apparent, and his wife experienced upon her side one little pang of remorse that she had permitted herself to lend belief to the gross calumny; but then, as she comfortingly thought, this would not have been but for that other overwhelming revelation of her dear one *living*. Very touching was this reconciliation, which his loving, delicate earnestness thus effected, brought out of so untoward material, that would bear extenuating and analyzing to every living soul except a wife; yet by his rare tact, and refined, ingenuous forethought and control made exceptional, high, and ennobling even to her.

And when he had finished the strange chronicle, had told of the self-denial for others, the lofty purpose in his heart from the beginning, and had depicted all the bitterness of the sorrowing loneliness and unceasing regret, she evinced no impatience that it had been kept from her, and gave him a forgiveness so full and unrestrained its generous love moved him to the soul, and falling upon his knees by her bedside, he caught her hand, clasping it, while his face was bowed above that tender grasp.

"Go to Constance, dear, and tell her all is well; that troublesome mysteries are accounted for, and to my satisfaction!"

"May I?"

"Certainly, I wish it."

He went, and Constance came to her; the sweet face bringing sunshine with it, and the remembrance of old days so vivid it seemed to hang this new happiness with a picture of that time, veiling all the sorrow since. There was such clear and candid beauty, she had been well likened to Evangeline and

the peerless Elaine: and no one looking thereon could doubt the purity and sincerity that were the lights behind.

Constance came to her, and then she might weep unchecked; tears would relieve. The feeling heart of Constance beating responsive measure, while her tears fell also; compassionate sympathy and loving regard for her friend caused this meeting to be very affecting to her.

"And we shall really possess the old home again?" It seemed so amazing after all that dread ordeal connected with its loss, and with yearning for confirmation of its momentous and happy meaning, Mrs. Travers looked in the girl's face eagerly.

"Yes, dear, so soon as you are well enough to bear the journey!"

"Then you will find me get well quickly!"

"You should do so, with the tender nursing that will wait upon recovery. I shall be often here, Ella will not leave you, and the lady below is—"

"Mindful as a sister, and so good, no reward would be acknowledgment for the considerate delicacy with which I have been tended."

Below, an interesting conversation upon this subject was passing between the Minister and Mrs. Evans.

"Any mention of recompense for the kind care shown to my wife would, for its utter insufficiency, be insult, therefore I do not think of it for a moment, but if our friendship will—"

"No," said the lady quickly, unconsciously glancing at the beautiful child sitting thoughtful and still, yet with a face of an infinite eloquence; "we can make no new friends, we do not visit nor desire visitors: the little I have done has been such as we would do for a stranger again, with readiness; but with reluctance, if in return the service created friendship it is neither convenient to maintain nor prudent to encourage."

And at that, recognizing under its plain speaking the depth of motherly solicitude, the Minister, far from being offended, appreciating its candour and forethought, replied, with graceful yielding to her opinion, "I have a proposal to make of

which I have been thinking with some earnestness, and hope to gain your sanction for the project: you would sorrow to be parted from your son, or I should like to place him at College, but if you will permit me to provide him with a tutor at home, I shall be very glad; a gentleman of your denomination whose learning and courtesy would make him an agreeable companion, and who might, if you please, reside at the Grange. If without hesitation or embarrassment you will accept this slight return-service, I shall feel very grateful; we shall neither then be under an obligation, and friendship will be—well, possibly, something in the dim future when years shall have fled and—"

"Mothers will less need the care that is all the world to them?" asked with instant yet not displeasing anxiety for that time; then adding gratefully, and with emotion, "But how *can* I thank you for this delicate proposal? My heart is too full to do so; my boy is so dear, so very dear! Dare I say that to accept it would be very welcome, after my recent unsociable and, as you must think, cold remark?"

"I understand, Mrs. Evans, and am quite in sympathy with it; such sincerity and such foresight are but too rare. I highly commend the spirit which prompted you so to speak. And now, without a word of remonstrance, you must please allow me to do as I wish!" And holding out his hand with a warm frankness denoting unmistakably the friendship upon his side, the agreement was ratified, and the Minister returned to his invalid, where he discovered with pleasure two more friends likewise upon the best of terms.

Now that the ice had been broken, he could sit down and talk happily and unreservedly of the future; of the past enough had been said.

And when her child came nestling by her side, so serene an expression of content and freedom from pain lighted up the invalid's fair face, they hoped it would not be long before she would be well enough to go downstairs.

The mind has much to do with restoration to health; the mind at rest and in perfect peace is a greater physician than any wealth can summon to aid recovery. And this gentle

lady who had been so prostrated mended thenceforth, and every day saw renewal of strength and revival of brighter spirits. Those watching so eagerly were unflagging in their kind attention, and not least of the incentives towards the lighter train of thoughts was given while the Minister sat reading, with his own thrilling yet attuned eloquence, from the famous writings as yet not read by her. Those were proud moments, resting back listening to that voice that seemed of more melodious depth than ever, and, following the rare pictures his genius had painted, until the confines of the walls of a sick-chamber seemed to fall down, and the trammels of a poor body's weakness to pass all away; so, another life revived; and to him, reading with lowered tones, and often glancing from the book to the face so still, yet with the smile unfaded, this seemed, indeed, the triumph over wintry seasons.

When convalescence enabled her to spend the first day downstairs, she seemed greeted by invisible kisses from numberless flowers, and when the first walk out was taken she appeared to be supported by angels: her strength came back as though glad to come, the colour re-tinted her face, and the Minister thought the journey might be attempted. They were all so eager to get back to the old home; and he believed it would, more than anything, joined to the healing air, tempered from east winds and variable changes, assist in the regaining of health and strength.

He had been busy during the probation time, fitting up the Grange with greater comfort in readiness for their return from Devonshire, when he would resume the work of the ministry with new zest, and yet stronger love for its high office and capacity for good; in this he would now be assisted, knees would no longer be feeble or hands droop, while a wife's encouraging sympathy made the life beautiful.

His neighbours, the tenants of the farm nearest the Grange, had been friendly disposed towards him, and now, while the old place was undergoing renovation, were eager with offers of those little courtesies people in out-of-the-way places do sometimes render one another. Additional interest attached to the circumstance through their niece having been kind to

little Ella in the time of that perilous captivity in the house of Bartholomew Rolf; and the Minister, grateful beyond describing to any who had shown kindness at the period of their trouble, when the girl was recognized by Ella, at once inquired into this change of scene. It appeared Mrs. Rolf had written to her brother-in-law to say that in consequence of Bartholomew having got into a little temporary trouble she was compelled to take a situation where she could not have Edith with her, and did they mind having the child at the farm. Now this was John Lessie, the brother of that unfortunate individual whose run of ill-luck upon the turf has before been commented upon. John Lessie was as steady and quiet-going as his brother was the reverse. Miss Ruth, his sister, who managed the house, was a genial, homely soul, kind of heart and fond of children; an astonishing knitter of worsted stockings, rearer of poultry, and cultivator of rose-trees; well-liked and much respected in the village, this pleasant woman of mature years often wished their home held some sunny-faced boy or girl, if but for company; and when the letter came from the widow of that wild brother whose name was seldom upon their lips, and who had often clouded their peace while living, she overruled John Lessie's scruples and set her heart upon the project. True they neither knew anything of the writer, they had heard in years gone by that she was fond of dress, and scarcely appeared in garb that was becoming, according to their old-fashioned notions, but of the woman personally they knew absolutely nothing; and it was scarcely worth while commencing the acquaintance thus late in the day, thought the cautious farmer; which need not affect taking their brother's child, pleaded the warm-hearted aunt; she wanted something to love, and was prepared to love this girl, be the parentage good, bad, or indifferent. They wrote consent, and Mrs. Rolf, who had accepted an engagement at a notorious place of al-fresco entertainment on the outskirts of London, was greatly relieved in consequence, for she loved Edith too well to wish to take her with her in the new sphere of livelihood. A livelihood with this lady represented unlimited beverage, free licence of manner, extravagance of apparel, and

male society liberally suffused with the stable, and she would rather Edith was out of it. It was the one and the only good deed of her life, and of it an immortal soul would perhaps be saved. The girl quitted the heat, smoke, spirits and water, licentiousness, quarrelling, trickery, meanness, and lies, to which she had been accustomed and steeped in all her life, and came to the quiet village, there to learn purity from the valley lilies, grace from a grove of bluebells, modesty from retiring violets, innocence from the daisies scrolling the slopes of downland as with a new and delightful language, and early hours of the delicate pimpernel. And the glimpse now and then of the Minister's little girl excited the ambition to resemble her in those graces of character which made this child lovable and admirable.

Before leaving, the Minister entrusted the keys of the Grange to John Lessie, who promised to overlook the work and communicate to him the progress.

On the eventful morning of departure Constance was very pale, and, the Minister saw, was suffering. Robert Evelyn came over in Mr. Garland's carriage, and the four would proceed so far as Brighton, where Constance was about to return to her father's house. Mrs. Travers, with tender thought, proposed that Constance should be solicited to accompany them to Torquay, and would really have been glad of her friend's company, but the Minister shook his head doubtfully, and, for her sake, declined to put the request.

And when Mrs. Travers affectionately pressed her hand, saying, "We shall think of you, dear, and you will think of us!"

"Yes," replied Constance, with a quivering lip, and—

> "That faint pink smile, so sweet, so cold,
> Like a wood anemone."

Then followed a word with the Minister while his wife and Mrs. Evans were interchanging farewells.

"We need not be strangers, when I return with renewed vigour to my work; I hope you will come and hear me often, and be very much with us in our home."

There was a beautiful light in the girl's eyes while looking up into his. "I shall never miss in my attendance at church, but shall be too busy with my household duties to visit very often."

Her friend took a small case from his pocket, upon the velvet within rested a magnificent gold chain and pendant in the form of a diamond cross. "Accept this, Constance, in memory of your kind sisterly support and sympathy when I stood literally Alone." It was very beautiful, and even though one of his dear smiles was more priceless in her eyes, she accepted it as his gift, to be treasured for a lifetime.

The journey was performed by pleasant stages, and the invalid was less fatigued than they feared would be the case. It was going home—there is all in this. Home! How the hearts of the three were thrilled at sight of the garden gate, standing wide open like the first word of welcome, taking them back into the boundary that had been their world of happiness; and if the world had widened to them they loved this none the less.

The mansion had been transferred as it stood, costly-furnishing, elegancies, extravagancies, luxuries surpassing any they had ever been accustomed to; it was Sir Kinnaird Dalton's generously characteristic mode of testifying to his gratification at the happy turn of events. "I can well afford it," he wrote, "since you have relieved me of my clever, but decidedly unpleasant Secretary, who is bound, he tells me, for India." The transformation the interior had undergone exercised a cheering influence upon the mind, its immediate effect was healthful, the banishment of all that could recall old sorrows was so complete; not a wall, door, ceiling, or window, but had been altered and beautified, and the feeling experienced was that of returning to one's home after it had, as Ella put it, been changed by the fairies into a palace. The garden, however, remained unchanged, and they were glad of this: after many years' acquaintance one grows to love the shape and station of every flower-bed, flower, and shrub. And they were on the right side of the year for its blossoming wealth, and in odorous summer evenings mother and child would swing

laughingly there to music, in a dainty shower of rose leaves thrown by a man's strong hand. The setting sun was tinting the old terraces and statues upon their arrival, and the fountains curled gracefully, almost merrily, and tossed rose-hued gem-like spray in their path, while the trees seemed tinted with gold, familiar foliage and well-known boughs, all greeting them with the most cheering expression it is possible for such to wear.

The Minister's servants from Hawkingdean had been sent on before, and awaited them with respectful attentiveness. They would receive little or no company, these maids therefore would form sufficient establishment according to their changed ideas; of old it was very different.

A large official-looking missive had arrived before them, it was a draft of apology and vote of confidence, drawn up by the churchwardens and very numerously signed by his parishioners; it conveyed their regret at the misunderstanding to which they had lent themselves, with a full assurance of the most loyal faith in their pastor; it witnessed to the good wrought by his ministry, and the deep sense entertained by all classes alike, of his unwavering self-denial and philanthropy. He valued the production at the rate this man would be likely to attach to all such veering of the vane; nevertheless it served to show that public opinion was pacified, and that the aspersions upon his fair fame had been but a nine-days' injury. This was no doubt in part due to his prompt and decisive action in the matter.

By the evening's post the Minister received also a few lines from Mr. Barnard, enclosing that note purloined from Miss Turner which was dropped by Mr. Garland in the church, of some importance at that time, since it was a letter of friendship and gratitude for the education Constance had received, written by Robert Evelyn from Torquay, and addressed to Lionel Travers. The lines accompanying it were as follows :—

"I return you the last piece of property belonging to you now in my possession. I start for India shortly. Going in for increase of business, hot pickles and condiments. Excuse haste; have to be here, there, and everywhere, and time presses.—N. B."

CHAPTER XLV.

BERESFORD COURT.

The winter drawing-room at Beresford Court.

Beresford Travers, Esq., Mr. Herbert Garston, and Mr. Penfold, a solicitor.

A very large room, where two old-fashioned fireplaces scarcely warmed the space, yet imparted a cheerfulness atoning to some extent. A dusky, richly furnished, heavily leathered and draped, sumptuously comfortable old drawing-room. Those massive chairs were of a type money could not procure at the present day; they had been there in the Father's and Grandfather's time. Mr. Travers would on no account have permitted the removal of one even from its historical position in the room. Mr. Travers was conservative in the matter of the ancient landmarks, within as well as without the house, and, from the line of old portraits to the cellars of old wines, knew the pride which the possessors of such heirlooms alone can know. It had been a terrible blow when Lionel's supposed death was broken to the old gentleman by Mr. Penfold, the faithful friend of the family for many years; and Mr. Travers had never recovered the shock of it. That there should be a possibility that the names of Beresford and Travers should perish with their honour, be held up to public pity, written down by some Landed Gentry or Peerage compiler, remembered by the old families of England as no longer one of themselves, or the Court and Park pointed at as once belonging to them, but now—to whom? It all rendered the old gentleman acutely sensitive; he could not reveal to any the mingled remorse, sorrow, pain, and disappoint-

ment at his heart, but was grave and composed under the trouble in his latter days.

The attached, warm-hearted friend, and his mother were staying on a visit at the Court. From the first they had relaxed no effort to bring about the restoration of Mrs. Travers and her child in the old gentleman's regard. It would at least provide a loving companionship: in Herbert Garston's opinion a very fair consolation for any amount of trouble.

Mr. Penfold had recently arrived, had lunched, and requested permission to lay before his esteemed client some lately acquired data of interest.

"First, sir, any news of my poor ward?" It was with tremulous eagerness, yet as scarcely daring to hope for a favourable reply, that Mr. Beresford Travers put the all-important question.

"None, sir." Mr. Penfold was very pointed in matters of business, and did not agree with prolonging suspense by a word. It was upon one occasion Mr. Penfold's pleasure to acquaint an unsuspecting but decidedly needy individual of the demise of a relative, with his accession to large possessions: the solicitor made short work of it, thus:—"Uncle deceased! Yourself heir! Considerable property! Condole with you! Congratulate you." Shaking hands with the approved legal movement customary under the circumstances.

Mr. Travers knew his solicitor, and simply bowed.

"Ran down to acquaint you with data *in re* Noel Barnard and others. Gang of four! Trading in Friday and Cursitor Streets; Merchandise and Money! Business conducted upon legitimate basis; difficult party; one of them at the head of a Bank! Bogus attorney, connected!"

Mr. Penfold pronounced the cautious piece of strategy with immense disgust, and as though he might have said, "Combine the four Courts of Chancery, King's Bench, Common Pleas, and Exchequer, and they won't circumvent this precious four with their Bogus attorney."

"You are of course alluding to the principals;" said Mr. Travers. "At the back of these are instruments of their villainy!"

"I allude to the responsible ones, with whom we have to

deal; the collapse of these involves dispersion of their abettors. This Barnard is a person of ability, and it may be impossible to bring him under coercion owing to the *point d'appui* of his defence being the law. Such a being would snap his fingers at any mittimus granted by any justice in the Civil realm."

"I agree with you, sir, he's an out-and-outer!" and Mr. Garston champed desperately with ever-increasing warmth.

"Sir," replied the solicitor, measuring his words leisurely, "all my experience in Civil, Common, and Statute Law has not introduced me to so obstinate a case. From the ramification it would be considered easy to effect a seizure, but as the law stands it is a matter of delicacy—"

"Yes, I *would* stand upon delicacy with the scoundrels!" interrupted the younger gentleman, vehemently.

"You misapprehend my meaning, sir;" explained the solicitor, politely.

"I think my friend understood your meaning, Mr. Penfold, but his warm interest and sympathy betrays him to ironical expression of his contempt;" and with a kind, affectionate smile, Mr. Travers reclined in his easy chair. The whole affair disturbed the reposeful grace of his years and the tranquillity of his nature, and it was eminently distasteful.

"I appreciate Mr. Garston's co-operation, as I am sure any one would, sir; it is a pleasure to meet with a gentleman so little disposed to let the grass grow under his feet when absorbed by a pursuit of this nature. As a rule men are indolent where the interests of another are concerned." Thus the solicitor, accepting his client's remark with becoming grace.

"I have to slightly amend that observation, sir," said Mr. Garston emphatically; "the inquiry does concern me, very deeply so! Lionel Travers was my best friend: much as I love Mr. Travers I loved his son better; my interest and sympathy, as you call it, represent devotion to his memory. Were Lionel Travers to be restored to life again, I could meet my friend with an honest brow, conscious of never having once forgotten him, ay, and of having given my all in the endeavour to clear his honoured name!"

"God bless you!" murmured the old gentleman. His face was turned from the speakers, and he was much affected.

Mr. Penfold coughed a little, dry, office cough. He was accustomed to cough when necessary to intimate to an overcome client that Time and Law will not wait upon Sentiment. "You will excuse my returning to the indictment, unfortunately *necessitas non habet leges.* We have no grasp of this person's present; he is literally within the pale of the law; our station must be, is the supposed crime *in esse?* If not, we are the weaker; a presumed *scandalum magnatum* has no validity until corroborative evidence is established."

"Such confounded villainy needs no corroborative evidence!" cried Mr. Garston, excited by the lawyer's coolness.

"I am sure you will pardon me," explained Mr. Penfold with deliberate civility; "nothing in criminal accusation can be established without corroborative evidence. The conspiracy to defraud, the plot to destroy, the after-scheme of abduction, are all suppositional on the part of my clients, and admit of no basis whereon the legal adviser can work!"

"Then in mercy's name make one, sir!"

The solicitor bowed, and with a dry smile, replied.—"This is not a case of *ex facto jus oritur;* there is little or no fact to serve. Under these conditions we are forced to retrace. *Coram nobis:* a man of opulence, trading largely, in perfectly solvent concerns, head of a flourishing company: this all had a beginning, the prosperity had an origin, the man came from somewhere; that point is all-important before progress is made with the present. We may trip him with his past."

"It is generally believed," put in Mr. Garston, hotly, "that he was generated on the sands of India, the old Serpent being his progenitor!"

"My dear Herbert!" murmured Mr. Travers, reprovingly.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I thought for the moment I was out of doors."

"What difference would that make?" asked his friend.

"More space for words, sir. But seriously, Mr. Penfold, your argument is good, I've been searching up his antecedents

no end of time, and I have arrived at the satisfactory point of finding him, everything, everywhere."

"Lord Campbell, sir, says 'It is the business of courts reasonably to shape their rules of evidence,' not to exclude the actual facts. The address, and the attainments we know this man to possess, point to an earlier career of honour—"

"Do I understand you to be eulogizing the man, sir?" asked Mr. Garston. "If so, I prefer to leave the room!"

"Not at all," answered the lawyer mildly, "I was about to deduce an inference. We cannot, *absque tali causâ*, discover either an ignoble, an ignorant, or a criminal first cause, and to disintegrate or disintricate the promoting influences is at once the commencement of operations and the foundation of our superstructure."

"One of the reasons why I have tried to do without legal assistance, Mr. Penfold, has been my apprehension of the mystery in which things are at present shrouded being rendered still thicker. I am sure out of regard for my altogether mediocre faculties you will simplify as much as possible. As the Bard of Avon—whom I don't admire half so much as most people, but agree with sometimes—says in King Henry VI.,—

> "'In these nice sharp quillets of the law,
> Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw.'"

Mr. Penfold smiled blandly. He was conscious of being wise himself, but experienced a certain humiliation under the reflection that that scoundrel O'Connor was a good deal wiser.

"The law, sir, scarcely permits of the simplified phraseology which you prefer."

"Exactly; just the reason I dislike it; the plainer the speech the more honest, in my opinion. Reducing our position to plain speech it amounts to this—after all the time and money expended, we appear to be no nearer obtaining a clue to poor Lionel's death and the difficulties which led to it, or the cause of those difficulties; no nearer the clue to the disappearance of his wife and child, and their present concealment, supposing them still alive; and this is eminently unsatisfactory, sir."

The family solicitor peered keenly under his shaggy eyebrows, drew his outspread hand thoughtfully down the short whiskers meeting under the chin, and replied,—

"Nothing is so difficult to deal with as a complication of surmises, none of which fall under *lex non scripta* or *lex scripta*. Order and method regulate those movements contriving the release from the complication; you will recollect Feltham said, 'Laws were made to restrain and punish the wicked; the wise and good do not need them as a guide, but only as a shield.' You are by admission ignorant of the law, possibly happily so; it must therefore be left in the hands of those versed in its science and structure, and so long as law is law it will be slow of progress, consistent with its majesty of purpose." The solicitor vindicated the gravity of his periods with much feeling. This address only served to further excite Mr. Garston, who replied hastily,—

"I am not familiar with Feltham, but I do remember warm-hearted, honest Swift's remark, that 'Laws are like cobwebs, which may catch small flies, but let wasps and hornets break through.'"

The solicitor bowed, as though to imply there was no doubt whatever about the Dean having thus committed an impropriety. Mr. Travers had listened to the exchange of quotation with some amusement; his friend Herbert seldom quoted; when he did it was always a more bitter sentiment than he would have thought of himself. "I think, perhaps," said the old gentleman courteously, "Buckingham's apothegm may adjust the difference between you two, 'However the law, to make it a mystery and a trade, may be wrapped up in terms of art, yet it is founded on reason and obvious to common sense.'"

"I'm not so sure of that," answered Mr. Garston, who was as fond of the last word as a Dutch market-woman; "but I would thank any law, and respect it, that effected an agreeable release from our difficulty."

"*Primâ facie*, insurmountable," said the solicitor; "calmly looked at, a matter alone of time and ingenious tracing out and following up, suspended during my research into antece-

dents, which indicates our strong line; it is useless to force this inquiry, the penetration of judicature takes its one course —minute examination and analysis, not cursory survey. True, there are instances of inquiries having been abruptly terminated by some sudden discovery or revelation, some coup the most profound of Chancellors would never have foreseen—God bless me!"

The exclamation was excited by the opening of the door; by there standing in the frame, as upon a life-size canvas, Lionel himself. The dusky, richly-furnished, heavily-leathered space between them and the doorway almost rendered the effect illusory—or might have done to any one but a family solicitor. Mr. Penfold certainly was astounded, and lost his habitual serenity. Mr. Travers looked up, turned round, started to his feet, and fell back again in the chair; it was so many years since he had seen his son, and the shock bedimmed his eyes; in the flash of the passing thought it seemed that from talking of his poor boy their fancy had wrought this shadowy appearance. It was Herbert Garston who, with giant strides, made for the door, with unceremonious disregard of the Beresford and Travers furniture. He knew it was no phantasm, but, whatever the meaning and the mystery, his lost and much-loved friend. He almost pounced upon him, so huge was his joy, quivering with wondrous emotion: red in the face, mighty of grasp, bursting with magnificent delight, he seized his hand, and shook it until fragile Lionel could scarcely support this tremendous manifestation of rapturous surprise. Lionel's resuscitation affected the three in different ways; upon this warm-hearted, hot-headed, devoted friend it took exuberant effect. There was no control about Herbert Garston, any more than there was any nonsense, and he at all times allowed the genuine state of his feelings to become evident. It served to give time for Mr. Travers to recover himself, and thus, upon this occasion was welcome. Mr. Garston dragged his recovered friend into the room, again caught his two hands, and almost wrung them off, pulled him more forward until in the space between fires, faced him about for the others to see,—high of colour from the violent

exercise to which he had been subjected, and laughing at Herbert's tremendous enthusiasm, as the latter cried out to the solicitor, "Here's the best release from all our difficulty."

The two gentlemen came hastily forward to greet the restored one, the solicitor falling back a pace to permit his esteemed client to embrace his son. This Mr. Travers did with powerful emotion, his tremulous, broken thankfulness, wonderment, and solicitude dividing interjections with affecting entreaties for Lionel's forgiveness that in past days he should have behaved with enmity and pride, which he had since so severely repented, conscious that his son had never acted contrary to honour and a lofty sense of filial duty.

When he had recovered himself a little, the solicitor came forward, and shook Mr. Lionel very warmly by the hand.

"I congratulate you, my dear sir. I will not say I was totally unprepared for this, but I must admit you have rendered the progress of our suit the utmost assistance in your power. At present we are in unhappy ignorance of the data *in re* your long absence, but we are satisfied when, *in propriâ personâ*, one we believed *civiliter mortuus* stands with us,—"

"Hale and hearty!" interrupted Mr. Garston, with an affectionately admiring glance at his handsome friend.

"By a physical figure Mr. Garston conveys the meaning I could not better have expressed." Mr. Penfold was marvellously polite, considering he deemed Lionel had perpetrated a *ruse;* and a *ruse* outside the law partook so closely of the nature of a trespass that the worthy solicitor regarded it with strong disfavour.

Presently this party of gentlemen became more calm, and better fitted for a little quiet family talk. From the origin, through the process to the sequel, Lionel recounted his history, and it was edifying to hear Mr. Garston exclaim,—

"So many times has my mother begged I would take her to hear that Westley Garland! What a fool I have been! True, we never go to Brighton; but he has so often been in London. Forgive me, my dear fellow, but it does seem so aggravating!"

"I am very glad you did not," replied his friend; "you

would not have taken things so quietly as did Sir Kinnaird the other evening in Brighton, whose greatest wonder seemed to be that I was not a Doctor of Divinity."

"And now, Mr. Lionel," asked the solicitor, "can you give us information concerning the gang that has troubled us so long?"

"The most satisfactory information I can give you, sir, is, that it will trouble you no longer. One of its prime agents, the brutal tool upon whom devolved the more gross description of its work, is a fugitive from justice for a murder committed upon the highway, in Sussex. The financial manager for the scoundrels is in the same predicament, for heavy frauds and embezzlement of money. The chief of this black firm, with whom I have had at the last a sharp encounter, will leave immediately for India, or a convict settlement."

"The latter, I hope!" said Mr. Garston devoutly.

"The only member left practising is—"

"Yes?" asked the family solicitor, with an animation he seldom displayed.

"Their attorney, one Coke O'Connor!"

The solicitor sank back gasping,—

"Then, sir, your firm is not exterminated, nor ever likely to be! With Lucifer at one end of the world and Beelzebub at the other, how on earth is peace to reign, or equity to flourish?"

"I always had an idea, Mr. Penfold," said Herbert Garston, with energy, "that equity flourished more conspicuously when peace was dethroned!"

Seeing that their friend was disconcerted by this blunt passage at arms, the Minister, addressing his father with loving respect, roused his curiosity in some degree.

"I've brought a little present for you, my dear father, but as I saw Mrs. Garston sitting cosily by the fire as I passed the library, I have left it with her to be duly admired."

"I must go and see what it is!" said the old gentleman, rising; he half guessed, and was thrilled with the pleasurable anticipation.

He found it there, upon a hassock beside the lady, and the

sight of its little flushed face, beautiful hair tossed back from the white temples, eyes looking up, taking in himself so long thought of, pleased him, and he quite lost the dignity upon which he prided himself, stooping to his grandchild, an inmate of Beresford Court, then, after all. Mrs. Garston was rejoiced to see this display of affection. The lady had been the connecting link, friendly both with Mr. Travers and with his son, and she bitterly felt the estrangement, had often put in a word for Lionel and his beautiful child when staying at the Court. She had deeply sympathized with the troubles, and terrible uncertainties succeeding the troubles, which had befallen the family: and when Lionel, with Ella, appeared at the library door, it had been a surprise and joy in one. He took her into his confidence first, having thus unexpectedly met with his old friend, and left Ella with her, thus spoiling his original little innocent scheme, which had been to allow the child to steal in unawares upon Mr. Travers and take him captive by herself.

Presently, after the departure of the solicitor, a happy circle gathered around the board at Beresford Court, only shadowed by the absence of Mrs. Travers, who was not yet strong enough to undertake a second journey; but Lionel's father announced his wish to return with them, and personally bear to his ward the message of his sorrow for the past.

And next to the re-union with his wife and recovery of his child, the reconciliation with his father was the event that gave greatest joy to the Minister.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CHEFFINGER DENOUEMENT.

High festival was being held at Cheffinger, the seat of Sir Dickson Cheffinger, Baronet, only recently and without litigation established in the home of his ancestors. It was the new Baronet's own proposal that a generous allowance should be paid annually to the late owner, and this he was wise enough to accept, without involving himself in the embarrassment of a losing contest.

And Sir Dickson, who would not have caused his greatest enemy a moment's pain, settled down upon his estates with a comfortable feeling, and that satisfaction experienced when the long waited for becomes with justice one's very own.

The slight excitement attendant upon the important results described did not serve to allay the chronic restlessness and eccentricity so peculiarly Sir Dickson's own, and he considerably astonished the servants of his predecessor, whom he would not discharge, when he informed them they would by no means have an idle time of it, as he proposed to entertain at Cheffinger large companies of those illustrious by birth, and eminent by genius; in fact he purposed extending right royal hospitality, upon a larger and more select scale than their late master, and for the carrying out of which the utmost resources of the establishment would be taxed. There was grave communing in the servants' hall: they thought the resources *had* been pretty well taxed, and, strong as was the staff of domestics, they contemplated excess of trouble with anything but pleasure; and when one day Sir Dickson inadvertently let fall the remark that he had issued invitations to the number of eight hundred, a species of dismay spread

through Cheffinger Abbey; and the retainers thought their former master, even if he was a morose man, or impetuously passionate as the mood took him, was more sensibly within bounds. However, elaborate preparations were made for the reception of the large company; and spacious as the Abbey appeared, it became problematical where the aristocracy would lay its head. The sleeping apartments were many, but the number of coming guests was beyond all reason; and the head servants, in conjunction with that important person the housekeeper, were troubled beyond measure to know what was to be done.

Unfortunately there was no hotel to which the unmarried gentlemen could be asked to resort; nor any neighbouring mansion, the friendly family whereof might courteously extend hospitality; room must be found for them all at Cheffinger, and those in office were distracted. Several extra chambers were gained by fitting up rooms over the stables for the servants, while the re-papered and re-furnished apartments thus obtained were set apart for the unmarried gentlemen aforesaid. Naturally Sir Dickson bustled about, quiveringly alert, and as he grew more excited, the more excited became his assistants. Of course he was inordinately happy; hospitality was the one great observance of civilized life that gave Sir Dickson unlimited pleasure.

For so large a number of visitors, great stores of delicacies and many wines were necessary, and the comptrollers of pantry and cellar had their hands full to inconvenience. A banquet was to be the foremost sign of the grand hospitality of Cheffinger, and since Sir Dickson considered the banquet the life and soul of genuine hospitality, he would set an example to some of these people of what English cheer and the cheer of Cheffinger should be.

"My guests," said Sir Dickson to himself, with sorrowful solemnity, "have often had to sit down to fare it has grieved me to see James place before them, but now that it is in my power, I will endeavour to make amends for all that my circumstances, not my will, have made me fall short of in the hearty cordiality I love."

Sir Dickson agreed with Edmund Burke, that "Nobility is a graceful ornament to the civil order, the Corinthian capital of polished society;" and he was determined to mark his admiration for the Corinthian capital by costly entertainment, possibly by altiloquence. The Cheffinger Baronet was a philosopher with all his eccentricity, and the acme of his philosophy was that method of patrician regard which he carried to the extremity of sublime nonsense, but which, the more nonsensical in the eyes of the unsympathetic, was the more real to him. The board might gleam with cups executed in *pâte sur pâte sous émail* by Gely; with old Venetian schmelze glass; with Celadon vases, whereon the modelling was a revelation; and Chalcedony-agate work by Salviati of Venice; with Neo-Grec exquisiteness from the house of Barbédienne of Paris; with gems from the Josephinen-Hütte, near Warmbrunn; with the rare painting and crystal hues found but upon the Schaffgotsch specimens; and with the priceless ruby glass made by Kunkel, the chemist to the Elector of Saxony, seen now but in the possession of a few old families, whose dining-tables it ornaments about once in each decade. The Cheffinger would display all this! The board should gleam from end to end of the long oak dining-hall with the glass which had given the Abbey fame, and which, with the deer and the timber, were quoted in connexion with the name. But it was not the glass, with all its splendour, that afforded in Sir Dickson's eyes the ultra-perfection of fitting reception at the table. It would have served for a mere ordinary gathering; but the party shortly to assemble demanded more elegant appointments. They saw glass in abundance elsewhere. He would introduce more sumptuous decoration and embellishment; the eight hundred should never forget CHEFFINGER! Time had been when its hospitality seemed kingly; that time should come again!

Thus the enthusiasm promoting such astonishing preparations occupied Sir Dickson with business from morning to night. He was in his element, and applied himself with a zest one would have scarcely credited his fragile constitution could hold in reserve. It did not, however, take a vulgar

turn; if the board gleamed with glass, it should not groan with gold, valuable and antique as was that of CHEFFINGER. It was not a Guildhall feast he invited his people to; something chaste and more in accord with the taste of a Cheffinger—a grand regalement Epicurus might have deigned to attend. Sir Dickson detested meanness, and would give the lie to it at his approaching jubilee. He had endured much at the hands of meanness; he would settle that score with the superfluity of generous kindness of which his soul was full. He never forgot the nasty and narrow traits pricking one hither and thither, but his was a lofty type of nature, that, if it qualified him for Colney Hatch, enabled him not only to graciously forgive the world in lieu of bearing it malice, but likewise to extend a magnificence of welcome that should blot out the memory of it on both sides.

It was a critical time, a time of acute anxiety, as the day fixed for the arrival of the guests drew near. Sir Dickson waxed feverish; the honour of the name it was his pride to bear was at stake; the opportunity of making that honour more splendid than of yore was at hand. Sir Dickson trembled lest anything should mar or prevent the carrying out of his arrangements.

What a change had come over his prospects, and how he had altered in his condition since those sad and poverty-stricken days when he entertained the noble and illustrious upon most sorry fare, but always to the best of his ability! "And even then," he said to himself complacently, "Royal Dukes deigned to visit me, and sit at the poor table; what will they do now?" It was certain that Sir Dickson expected the attendance of royal, noble, and illustrious personages without limit now that he had space and means to receive them. Among the guests invited there could not but be many altogether unknown to Sir Dickson, but he did not trouble about this; frigidness was not one of his fashionable qualities, and he was so in harmony with all men, that a stranger remained such but a very short time.

The information of the coming of Royalty rather increased the excitement. The eight hundred and odd forming the expected party were considered sufficient tax, but when to these,

certain personages of more exalted station were added, it seemed the straw destined to break the back of that patient camel, ycleped the household.

The eventful day dawned, and immense was the agitation. It almost seemed that the very sunshine of that day was different to the usual beaming; the red deer herding beneath the distant trees, forming the attraction of the park view as seen from the mansion, were, to the impressed servitors, duly conscious of the importance of the day; and those old trees sheltering them were surely flooded with more radiance than usual.

Hours of the day slowly passed and nothing transpired; all were upon the look-out in anxious expectancy, so the time dragged tediously. The great banquet was ready for the great invited, but these seemed tardy, and Sir Dickson, care on his forehead, walked gravely the wide hall and terrace with a manner slighted and discomforted, but not with any loss of faith in the coming of the guests or in the guests themselves. All the hours between noon and eventide the distant drive was eagerly scanned by many pairs of eyes, but no sign of the approach of a party, large or small, rewarded the diligent watchers.

Then a vehicle was discerned, but not a royal vehicle evidently; for one of the footmen said it was "a buggy!" Any way it was an unassuming chariot whatever its name and style. To it was harnessed a horse—it might be the distance which reduced equine perfection, but to those on guard it looked decidedly bony. Upon the driver's seat was a man; they could not distinguish the man's quality, but it was remarked with disgust that he was not in livery, and that he wore a head-dress described by the same footman as "a billycock!" Sir Dickson saw the strange concern also, and hastily gave it as his opinion, to an attendant, that it was some of the luggage being sent on in advance. "We shall hear something now!" said the Baronet with a slightly solemn manner. And, as the strange conveyance approached, he breathed quick with impatience. The man who was driving was in no way intimidated by the spacious front of the Abbey or by the string of retainers upon the steps. Possibly he was accustomed to driving up to large places, or he may not have

been of the impressionable order; it is certain he was not abashed by the architectural or personal glories of Cheffinger. He drove up to the front entrance, and jumping down from the box, hurried, with the unmistakable manner of the hackney cabman, to open the door for his passenger. A sallow-faced little woman alighted, with precise care that her best dress did not become soiled while she was getting out; it was a quiet grey-coloured dress of no fashion nor style, indeed neat to a fault: she had linen cuffs over black kid gloves; a plain black bonnet above the grey bands of hair; a large gingham umbrella; and a small parcel done up in brown paper.

Poor Sir Dickson standing aghast, to the front of the scandalized retainers of CHEFFINGER, recognized his sometime landlady, the amiable Miss Turner, and he was very much perplexed; but his innate politeness, never entirely absent, prompted what his presence of mind neglected—he advanced to greet the lady and invited her to enter.

Miss Turner, equally pleasant, reminded the Baronet in a low voice of a request, and promise she had made during his sojourn in Brighton, but which, up to that moment, he had forgotten every word of; it was to this effect—when he was settled in his own house she was to be sure and come to see him, in return for her attentive kindness while an inmate of her house. Sir Dickson had not settled the small account connected therewith, but promised to do so when Miss Turner called upon him; he also said that if she would do this he should consider it a privilege to discharge the travelling expenses incurred upon the journey. And the plain-dealing, simple-hearted woman, had thought much of this little plan, and ultimately decided to accept the invitation, made, she believed, in all earnestness; and came hither, bringing her bill, and that parcel, which Sir Dickson with singular sensations unfastened in the banqueting room, Miss Turner standing by dazed and bewildered by the profuse splendour around. The brown paper removed, there fell out one pair of paper cuffs, a collar, a pair of carpet slippers, and a faded "Peerage."

"You left them upon the chest of drawers," explained Miss Turner quietly.

"I thank you madam, I—"

Sir Dickson could say no more, he felt a choking at the throat; all the old painful time was revived by the sight of them, the weary poverty-stricken era when CHEFFINGER—the dream of forty years — was the sole hope supporting him. Gratitude takes different modes of expressing itself; Sir Dickson's took this mode—waving his hand towards the splendid array, he said seriously,—

"I owe all this to your friend, the Minister."

Apparently it touched a responsive chord, for the pew-opener brushed some tears aside while bowing her head with sympathetic interest.

Miss Turner was introduced to the housekeeper at CHEFFINGER. The condescending airs assumed by this person did not trouble Miss Turner, who was very meek and naturally grateful, so that they got along pretty well together; and the Baronet having announced the visitor as his friend, it guaranteed her respectful attention. But all this time Sir Dickson's anxiety was not allayed, and the imaginary guests did not, of course, appear. The time went on and the day drew in, the trees in the park became indistinct, the drive was lost sight of in a dim perspective, evening crept over the fair domain with a gradual abstraction of its beauties, and still the humble pew-opener remained the solitary guest at CHEFFINGER: surely such a jubilee never was known! But Sir Dickson was not going to be depressed by the discourtesy of those upon whom he had depended; if they lacked the fine breeding and polished manners of a Cheffinger he might feel regret, but he could not feel surprise, (for the Cheffingers were unapproachable); nor annoyance, for he possessed the pleasant consciousness of having done his best. He was scrupulous to do this at all times, and left the rest; he did it now, by ordering that the wax lights upon the banquet-table should all be lighted and dinner be served for his visitor and himself; and a very elegant service it was, as may be imagined from the profuse choice. The host and his visitor sat alone at the board, and Sir Dickson's elaborate cordiality relieved both the isolation and embarrassment.

Sir Dickson had before this been charmed and won by the

quiet, matronly, thoughtful manners, and the considerate regard shown by his whilom landlady for his comfort. He now had a further opportunity of observing those agreeable traits, and long before the evening was over felt within himself that he had never seen any one who so truly engaged his appreciative thought, always excepting the Princess, who had once flashed upon his dull life radiantly.

Thus Miss Turner helped to console the originator of the entertainment for what was at once a blow and disappointment.

"I've a very good mind," said Sir Dickson, "not to issue any more invitations; if people like to call, well and good, they will take us as we are, and if they choose to stop away they must do so. The worst of a man's entering upon his property late in life is that he is looked upon with suspicion; and not treated with the genial unreserve customary where he has occupied the estates all his life."

On the following day Miss Turner would have introduced her business, wishing to go to her own home; but Sir Dickson so persistently entreated she would make her stay a day or two longer, and she enjoying it so much, never having had a treat of the kind before, and feeling the change beneficial (it had been sorely needed as she knew all too well before entering upon the long journey—she felt it the one and sufficient justification), she consented and stayed on a while longer. But when the day of departure came, while standing in the great drawing-room to say farewell to her good-natured host, she thought, with a pang, of the splendour she was about to leave, the humble station to which she was returning, and she sighed, as the quietest and best may sigh sometimes without harm to any. The Baronet heard it, faint though it was, and divined the cause; and CHEFFINGER was all too dear to himself not to sympathize with the regret of a visitor at quitting its hospitable shadow. And he had something else upon his mind.

Closing the doors, Sir Dickson returned with some mystery of manner to his pale, mild-eyed guest.

"You are sorry to leave us, Miss Turner?"

"Very, Sir Dickson! I shall ever remember your goodness with gratitude!"

"Yes, at one time it wasn't in my power, I couldn't anyhow do as I would. Providence has conferred upon me all that was very justly mine own, and now that I am enabled, it is a pleasure to me to extend hospitality to my friends. You were especially good to me in the day of adversity, and I could see it was not altogether because I was recommended by the Minister; there was deeper thoughtfulness than comes of interest. Miss Turner, I esteem and appreciate the good qualities you possess, and believe they would grace any station, and honour any person—will you become Lady Cheffinger?"

And the man they thought mad, gallantly, but with profound respect, took the hand of the Minister's pew-opener.

It came with overwhelming surprise, and would have staggered the heads of younger and more giddy women, but this quiet person did not lose her presence of mind nor become bewildered at the view of the dazzling destiny open to her. To accept it she must resign attendance upon a ministry and its exponent, representing far more to her than all the resplendent plate and glass, and jewelry and ancientry of CHEFFINGER. The diminutive little business-house, with the apartments that would so seldom let, were thought of in a trice, side by side with that honourable name and title she was asked to share by a man whom she really and truly liked (next to the Minister) better than any one she knew. Hers was a very plain honest nature, and once like always like was the basis of it; wealth and titles are not everything to every woman, and depend upon it some of the quiet ones gliding on through life, well-nigh unnoticed beside their more attractive sisters, possess depths of self-denial, constancy, and endurance that would astonish us, did we know all; Miss Turner thanked Sir Dickson Cheffinger, with much feeling, and declined the honour he would bestow, but liked him none the less for it.

The Baronet, nevertheless, perceived half-lurking partiality behind the diffident refusal, and moreover saw no possible reason why the lady should decline his offer. He had long recognized in her gentle ways and quiet demeanour, graces

that would become a Duchess, and he modestly felt to possess qualities which would go well with these. Allied with this thought was one of wonderment that a person of Miss Turner's good sense could any how decline CHEFFINGER, if she declined himself; there must be some mistake somewhere! Sir Dickson repeated his proposal more persuasively, used manly and plain terms in harmony with the sincerity he loved, and in compliment to the genuine character he admired, and she heard him without displeasure, but with corresponding freedom from affectation replied,—

"I thank you, Sir Dickson, and beg you will not misinterpret the motive when I again say how earnestly I appreciate your goodness, but judge it proper to decline your proposal. The station I have filled has not fitted me for that to which you would raise me."

"On the contrary, Miss Turner, I could not select a lady from any station to my mind more honourable, while a long association with Mr. Garland cannot but prove profitable to any person; it creates nobility; and while I can only confer poor earthly rank, he gives to one the dignity for all eternity."

Her eyes filled with tears at the thought, for she loved his high ministry all too well, and recalled with affecting emotion the precious guidance, solace, and encouragement that had so often fallen from his lips. To accept this offer would mean the loss of that, when, his much-needed vacation at an end, he would resume his exceptional mission. Noticing her more tender mood, Sir Dickson, with feeling, turned away for a minute or two, and it was not until she made a movement towards the door that he interposed; the quiet-looking gentle countenance, the quiet-looking grey gown, the quiet-sounding footfall, were too much for him, he might never discover one of her sex so quiet again, so delicately suitable to grace the honours of CHEFFINGER: he hastened to her side; caught her hand with gallant homage, yet with such evident respect it wooed with the plea more directly from the heart than from the lips, and without resenting the gentle force or turning away her face, she smiled very kindly upon him, while saying,

as one might say it to an importunate, inconsiderate one whose happiness is dear to us,—

"You have not sufficiently weighed this matter; you are kindly impulsive and led away by a momentary appreciation of my peace-loving and unassuming disposition; excuse my plain-speaking, it is right at this time."

"And do you think a man who weighs for forty years that which should be his own, is not accustomed to well-considering matters? Ah, Miss Turner, you do not know all it is to stand isolated with one's thought, intensely lonely, without sympathy, yet with a heart full of affection, and a soul that would soar if it had but companionship!"

Oh, yes, she did, and this appeal went home to her as none had done; she knew that feeling; a kindred nature stood by her, and it was more to her than degree, than wealth, ay, and as much as was charmed listening to the inspired eloquence of one who could never be more to her than the adorable teacher, the spiritual guide from narrow ways and weary cares to the higher rest. Miss Turner knew perfectly well that Sir Dickson Cheffinger was rather qualified by weakness than by strength, that he was as poor a mortal as herself by physical laws, and the worthy soul would feel really happier to know that he was well and kindly cared for.

"I can quite sympathize with the experience you describe, Sir Dickson!"

"And you will try to alter it, will change your mind, will you not?" he pleaded earnestly.

She was thoughtful an instant, and then with a voice vainly struggling to be calm, she tremulously answered, "Yes."

Sir Dickson Cheffinger was exceedingly gratified, and when Miss Turner quitted Cheffinger Abbey, it was only to arrange for the disposal of her business, and the election of her successor at the church. Mr. Garland was of course communicated with, and he expressed his satisfaction at the result of the friendship between his old friend and their much esteemed helper in the past; furthermore, he said it would give him pleasure to perform the interesting ceremony upon his return to his church.

He fulfilled this promise; and the resumption of duty caused friends and admirers to flock about him with flattering testimony to the regard in which he was held; and then, more than ever, the friend of the people, and still the quoted of the cultured, he knew a joy unknown to him before, a joy that caught its sunshine of the fair faces of those imparting the rarest delight and richest treasure upon earth, a loving wife and lovely child.

THE END.